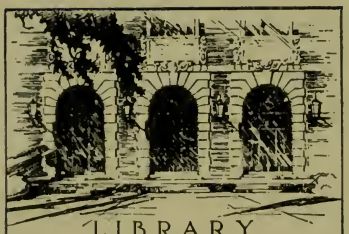
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THE TREMLETT DIAMONDS

BY

ALAN ST. AUBYN

AUTHOR OF

'A FELLOW OF TRINITY,' 'THE JUNIOR DEAN,' 'THE OLD MAID'S SWEETHEART,' ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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THE TREMLETT DIAMONDS

CHAPTER I.

THE GIFT OF THE BRIDEGROOM.

It had been a very busy day: it was the eve of Dora Bellew's wedding. There had been so much to do. There is always so much left to do on the last day. There were the trunks to pack—the trunks that the bride was to take away with her on her wedding journey—the wedding presents to arrange, and the preparations for the morrow to complete.

Dora Bellew set out the wedding presents herself; she was very particular in arranging them. There were a good many to arrange.

They had been pouring in for a week past; some had only arrived that day. One, the very last, arrived on the eve of the wedding, just as she was giving a finishing touch to them—putting the last pair of salt-cellars in their place. 'It is very tiresome,' she remarked plaintively, 'so many people sending duplicates.' She had had at least a dozen pairs of silver salt-cellars and six sets of teaspoons, and every variety of afternoon-tea table.

The last present that arrived was from the bridegroom. It was not a salt-cellar, or a set of teaspoons, or an afternoon-tea table. Dora's fingers trembled as she opened it: the parcel had been brought into the room where she was arranging the wedding presents, ready for the guests to admire them on the morrow. They could not help admiring them; it was a lovely lot of presents for one girl to receive. Edith Darcy, one of the bridesmaids—the principal bridesmaid—who was helping to arrange them,

thought she had never seen anything so lovely in her life.

There was only Edith in the room when Dora Bellew opened the parcel from her lover. She opened it slowly, with trembling fingers —she did not know why they trembled; they had not trembled when she opened the other parcels—and Edith watched her with sparkling eyes.

'It's—it's—what is it? Guess, Dora, before you open it!' she cried gaily, as Dora came to the last wrapping.

'It's another case of spoons,' Dora said, with a laugh—rather a nervous laugh.

'Oh, it can't be spoons; it's too long.'

'That's the case. It's something in a case. I'm so glad it's in a case! I love things in cases!'

Still she did not attempt to open it.

'It's a very long case,' Edith said reflectively; 'it might be——'

'Fish-carvers!' the bride-elect suggested solemnly.

'Nonsense! He wouldn't send that sort of thing; it's something to wear.'

Edith was quite right—it was something to wear. It was a lovely diamond necklace. When the case was opened it seemed to fill the room with light. Dora gave a little scream of delight, and Edith held her breath. It quite took away her breath to look at it; it was something like a necklace! Not a row of single stones, but a beautiful necklace with pendants, and loops of diamonds, and a lovely centre ornament in the form of a thistle.

Captain Tremlett had had the old family diamonds reset for his bride, and the setting of the necklace had been his own design. The thistle had something to do with the arms of the family.

'You never will be able to wear this, Dora,' Edith said presently, as she held the necklace up to the light.

'Why not? Why shouldn't I wear it?' Dora

asked, pouting. She couldn't understand Edith's objection.

'Oh, there's so much of it! You would look like an idol.'

She was angry with herself the moment after she had spoken. She couldn't think why she had said such an unkind thing about Captain Tremlett's present to his bride.

'Why should I look like an idol?' asked Dora in an injured voice, putting the beautiful shining thing back into its velvet case.

'It was only fun, dear. I don't know why I said it. You would look lovely in it. Try it on—you must try it on.'

Dora took it out of the case rather unwillingly, and Edith clasped it round her white throat. It was a beautiful slender white throat, and a plump, soft, creamy neck. Dora Bellew had the loveliest white skin in the world, and the beautiful necklace gleamed upon it as it had gleamed and glistened in its white velvet case; it did not

lose any brilliancy by its change of surroundings.

This is saying a great deal. It is not every woman's throat that sets off a diamond necklace.

'It looks lovely, dear!' Edith said, kissing her. 'How proud he will be to see you wearing it!'

'I don't know,' Dora said with a sigh, looking at her reflection in the glass critically. 'I think there *is* too much of it. I shall always feel like an idol when I wear it—like that image of Buddha, the fat, grinning bronze thing in the hall.'

She took the necklace off, and put it back into its case and closed it. It shut with a spring, rather a hard spring to close.

'Why don't you leave the case open like the rest?' Edith asked.

'Oh, I hate to see it open! It reminds me of Buddha. Perhaps, if I don't see it, I shall forget all about it when I wear it.'

Everybody admired Captain Tremlett's beautiful present. If anyone thought it was too elaborate for so youthful and *petite* a bride, he held his peace.

There was a houseful of wedding guests, uncles and aunts and cousins, and they all agreed that it was a most beautiful gift—a quite magnificent wedding gift.

The diamond ornaments and the more valuable articles of jewellery among the presents were carried upstairs at night, and locked away in Mrs. Bellew's fire-proof safe. There was a fire-proof safe, almost as large as a room, built in the wall of her dressing-room, where she kept her valuables, and where the silver things belonging to the house were locked up at night.

Dora's wedding presents had a separate locked cupboard to themselves. Edith helped her carry them upstairs, and stayed behind to lock the door of the safe, while Dora went in to say 'Good-night' to her mother.

It was a long 'good-night'—her last at home; she did not know how hard it would be until she came to say it. She was going away on the morrow; the old home-life was at an end. A new life was opening before her—a new life with new ties. She was going out from the old tried love and shelter to the new and the untried. No wonder that she could not tear herself away.

It was quite late before Dora fell asleep that night; she had so much to talk about to Edith, who slept with her. Edith was to be her bridesmaid on the morrow, and she was staying with the other wedding guests in the house.

When she grew tired of her own concerns, she talked about Edith's, or, rather, yawned over them: they were not so interesting as her own.

'I suppose you will be married before we come back, Edie?' she said sleepily.

'I don't know, I'm sure. Derek wants it to be in October, when he gets his leave. We

could go abroad for the winter ; but I don't see what we could do when we come back. We couldn't always live abroad, and we have not enough money between us to begin housekeeping with. We should have to take a flat, if we began in the very smallest way, and it would have to be furnished. Sometimes I think I will give it all up. It isn't fair to Derek, such a boy as he is—he is five years younger than I am—to let him in for the care and worry of it. When he ought to be enjoying himself like other men, taking life easily, he'll be tied up to an old woman—I feel quite an old woman sometimes—and have the cares of a house and family. Poor Derek ! If I loved him as he deserves to be loved, I should let him go.'

There were tears in Edith Darcy's voice and on her pillow as she spoke of her lover and the sacrifice he was making for her sake, but she was speaking to unheeding ears. Dora had fallen asleep.

Dora Bellew was married the next day. It

was rather a gloomy wedding, in spite of all the gay preparations that had been made for it. The guests had to drive from a distance. Nunwell was five miles from the nearest town —the nearest town was Hereford—and those who drove over in open carriages got wet through before they reached the church. It rained without a break the whole day, a gray, dreary autumn day, with the wet west wind beating against the church window-panes, and the rain coming down on the roof all through the service.

Dora could hear the monotonous drumming of the rain on the roof of the chancel, and the patter of the rain-drops on the leaves of the trees in the churchyard outside, all the time she was kneeling before the altar. She heard the mournful drop, drop, drop, above the solemn words of the service and the responses of the bridegroom, like a dreary refrain. The church was damp and cold, and she shivered in her white, as she stood before the altar with the

bridegroom's hand clasping hers. He was a big, heavy, dark-browed man, and he did not smile upon her once all through the service, as a bridegroom should have done. Everyone remarked that he was looking distinctly unamiable. Something had gone wrong, and he was letting off his sulks and his ill temper upon the poor little white-faced bride. Everybody agreed that it was a very great match for little Dora Bellew ; there was not a girl in the county that would not have jumped at Lionel Tremlett, and yet very few envious glances were cast at the bride as she walked in her lace and orange-blossom down the aisle by his side.

He let someone else put her in the carriage, and he got moodily in beside her, and drove back to the house with the window down all the way—he would not have it up—and his white-gloved hand on the sill, with the rain drifting in. He did not speak a word to the little trembling bride on the way back from the church, and she sat shivering in her wedding

finery, with great splashes of rain drifting in on her satin gown, and the tears, which she could not keep back, dropping silently on the bouquet of orange-flowers in her lap. Everybody agreed that the bridegroom was behaving like a bear. There was a reason for his behaving badly. Dora had disappointed him—she had slighted his wedding gift.

He had expected her to wear the diamond necklace which he had had mounted to his own special design as a wedding ornament, and she had left it at home. She hadn't even taken it out of the case : she had brought it downstairs on the morning of the wedding-day, and put it among the rest of the presents, but she had not opened the case. No one but Edith had noticed that the case was not opened ; she remembered that unfortunate allusion to Buddha when she noticed it, and held her peace.

No one had suggested that Dora should wear the necklace at her wedding : it would have looked dreadful on that chilly, depressing

morning to have gone to church blazing in diamonds. The bridegroom had noted its absence, and he took it into his head to be sulky about it. He had often been known to be sulky with other people, but he had never been sulky with Dora before, and his sulkiness on this particular occasion did not seem to bode well for her future happiness.

It was really a great match for her. She could not expect to have everything; there are drawbacks to every lot—drawbacks, and compensations. Captain Tremlett was the head of the family. It was an old county family: the Tremletts had come over with the Conqueror. There were branches of the family all over the county—Mrs. Bellew had been a Tremlett; but the head, the acknowledged head, old Sir Bourchier, lived in great state at Castle Hill in the northern division of the county, and Captain Tremlett was his only son. Dora Bellew would be Lady Tremlett one day, and she would be the head of the family.

Everybody agreed she was a lucky girl—an awfully lucky girl.

Sir Bourchier was at the wedding, and the Miss Tremletts, the Captain's sisters. They took no part in the ceremony; they were not among the bridesmaids; they merely looked on. They could not think what their brother could see in such an insignificant little creature as Dora Bellew—a dowdy, plump little thing, with only a soft white skin, and soft brown eyes, and a soft purring voice, to recommend her. There was something so soft about Dora, soft and still, that they used to call her 'Mousey'—'Little Mousey.' The very last person in the world that Sir Bourchier would have expected his son to choose for a wife was Little Mousey Bellew. Of course there was the connection—she was about a sixteenth cousin—all the Bellews in the county were connections; there was nothing to find fault with in her birth. The Bellews, if they hadn't got a penny, were good enough to marry anybody.

Sir Bourchier had no fault to find, so far as family went, with his son's choice, but Mousey —he had always known her from a child as 'Mousey'—was not exactly the sort of girl that he would have chosen to sit at the head of his son's table, to bear the weight of the family honours when he was gone. He had had a dreadful haunting fear—it almost amounted to a conviction—that his son would never marry, that there would be no descendants to carry on the race in the old line, that the title would go to a distant branch.

He was glad, therefore, to welcome any daughter-in-law, and whatever his private opinion might be, he welcomed Dora into the bosom of his august family with stately, old-fashioned courtesy. He unbent so far, when the party came back from church, as to kiss her soft white forehead, and express a hope that she would be very happy, and that he should see a great deal of her at Castle Hill. The two Miss Tremletts followed their father's lead

and kissed her damp cheek—at least, they made a peck at it. They were elderly young ladies, and were not effusive.

Poor little Dora cried all through the breakfast: she couldn't keep her tears back. She was crying at one end of the table, and her mother crying at the other, while the new son-in-law sat staring at everybody in gloomy silence. He got up from the table as soon as he could; he didn't wait till the speeches were over; he was in a great hurry to get away. He flurried poor little Dora out of her wits; he didn't give her time to say all her 'good-byes,' and drove off to the station an hour before the train was due.

He upset everything with his unnecessary haste. The bride's travelling-boxes were fastened down hurriedly, and a lot of things that she wanted were left out, and a lot of things that she didn't want were put in. Some of the jewellery—the bracelets and ornaments that were among the wedding presents—was put in in a hurry at the last moment. No one

knew exactly what was put in, it was all done in such a scramble.

When the tearful bride had driven away, the guests began to disperse. Sir Bourchier and his daughters were among the first to go. The big lumbering family chariot was brought round, and the head of the family departed in gloomy state. Dora's new sisters-in-law had not taken the trouble to look at the wedding presents she had spread out with so much delight before they went away. They did not even glance at the silver salt-cellars or the afternoon-tea tables. There was a ton of old silver plate, it was rumoured, at Castle Hill, and they turned up their high-bred noses at little Dora's silver spoons.

They did not stop to see the present that Captain Tremlett had sent his bride, the old family diamonds that he had had set in that elaborate necklace. Everybody in the confusion seemed to have forgotten that unlucky necklace.

What with the rain, and the bridegroom jumping up in that ridiculous way in the middle of the marriage feast, and the scramble to get away, not many of the guests had seen the wedding presents.

It was quite late in the day, when nearly everyone was gone, that somebody remarked that closed morocco case among the presents.

'Oh, haven't you seen it?' Edith said; she was generally showman—there was no one else to go round with the people; 'it is the gift of the bridegroom. It is quite the—the—most magnificent——'

She had been trying to open the case—it was rather a hard spring to unfasten—and she stopped suddenly, and the guests who had crowded round, and who were watching her unfasten it, saw her face fall—saw the colour drop quite out of it.

The case was empty!

CHAPTER II.

GOTHAM.

No one knew what had become of the diamond necklace. Had Dora taken it with her? She had gathered up a few things in a hurry—some gold bangles and a bracelet—and she had left their cases behind her, empty. There was no room in her travelling-trunks for cases. She might have taken the necklace, too, as the bridegroom made such a fuss about it. She might have taken it with her to please him, to wear at dinner for his especial benefit.

It was ridiculous to think that it was lost or stolen; there was no one at Nunwell to steal it. The door of the room in which the presents

were set out had been locked while the wedding party were away at church, and the housekeeper had kept the key in her pocket. It was absurd to make a fuss about it—enough fuss had been made about it already. Most likely the bride had taken it away with her; and she would come down to dinner in it by-and-by. She was such a sweet-natured little thing, that she would wear it day and night if she thought the wearing of it would give her lord and master pleasure.

Mrs. Bellew made so little of the loss, or rather the disappearance, of the necklace, that she only mentioned it in her letter to Dora in a postscript. When everybody was gone, she comforted herself by sitting down and writing to Dora. There were so many instructions she had intended to give her, so much to say that had been left unsaid, that she forgot all about the bridegroom's present until she had finished her letter; and then she added the postscript:

'Pray let me hear,' she wrote, 'if you have

taken Lionel's beautiful necklace away with you; we are wondering what has become of it.'

Edith Darcy went away the next day. There was nothing for her to wait for. She had seen Dora safely married, and she had cut up the cake; she had spent the remainder of the wedding-day in squeezing bits of cake into little oblong boxes and writing people's names upon them. She was quite sick of the sight of wedding-cake when she had finished. She had made up her mind that if her wedding did come off, she would do without a cake. It would be a distinct economy, to begin with. She would put a notice in the papers, as people do after deaths, only with a variation, '*No cake*.'

Mrs. Bellew smiled when Edith told her of the economy she was planning; it was the first time she had seen her smile since Dora drove away.

'You will have to do without a great many things besides cake, dear,' she said, 'if Captain

Stanhope has only got his pay. I don't see how you are going to live upon it.'

Edith sighed.

'It will not be quite all,' she said, hanging her head, and reddening at the mention of her marriage, like a girl in her teens; 'I have a little of my own, you know.'

'That will only keep you in clothes, dear,' Mrs. Bellew said kindly. 'You will be expected to dress; you can't economize in dress, whatever else you do. Derek—Captain Stanhope—has to keep up his position in the regiment, and he could not afford to let his wife look dowdy; besides——'

She stopped herself and coloured; she had almost thought aloud.

'Besides, I am not so young, so attractive, that I can afford to be dowdy?' the girl said quickly, with a thrill of impatience in her tone, her face flushing and her mouth quivering.

She had a beautiful tender mouth, rather wide, and thin, sensitive, scarlet lips; she could

not keep her mouth from quivering if anything moved her.

'I didn't mean that, dear. You are more attractive than most women. When you have got a colour, when you are excited, you are always the loveliest woman in the room. You were handsomer than any of Dora's bridesmaids—everybody remarked it; but you want to be well dressed. I never knew a woman who paid for dressing more than you do.'

This was kindly meant. Mrs. Bellew would not have said anything to hurt the feelings of Dora's friend for the world. Edith had been a constant visitor at Nunwell for the last ten years. Mrs. Bellew almost loved her as a daughter of her own.

'It is very dear of you to say so,' Edith said, with something like a sob. 'If you knew how little I have to dress upon, you would only wonder that I can dress at all—that I am ever fit to be seen. You would cease to be surprised

that I look shabby—that I am a disgrace to you all.'

Her voice was unsteady, and there was a thrill in it that touched the elder woman and brought the tears to her eyes.

'You have never, never disgraced us, darling; you have always looked lovely! No one could tell, to see you, that you had not as much to spend upon dress as other girls. You always looked better than Dora. Poor Dora! she hasn't the figure to show off anything, as you have. If you put the richest things on her, it does not seem to make any difference.'

'Dora has made a very good match, in spite of it; and I—I am going to marry a poor man with nothing but his pay,' Edith said, with a laugh—a rather tremulous laugh.

She went away the next day. She went quite early, before the letters were in. She had to go to the other end of England, and she started by an early train.

She had said good-bye to Mrs. Bellew the night before, and Gracie—Grace was Dora's younger sister—was asleep when she came into her room in the morning, to kiss her before she went away. She did not awake her; she left the room on tiptoe, and went softly down the stairs, lest she should wake any of the sleeping inmates.

It seemed to her, when the hall door had closed noiselessly upon her, and the carriage that bore her to the station drove away, that she had stolen out of the house like a thief.

Edith had intended, when she decided to start by that early train from Hereford, to stop in town by the way and do some shopping. Her destination was some forty miles the other side of London. She would have to cross from west to east; she would have to drive through London. It would not have delayed her to have done an hour or two's shopping in town, by the way. She had a great deal to do, if she were to be married in October. There were

frequent trains from the Great Eastern railway-station to St. Oswald's, and she had plenty of time on her hands.

When she reached town she changed her mind. She had consulted her purse on the journey, and a review of its contents had made her alter her mind.

'It was not worth while,' she reminded herself, with a sigh, 'to go and look over a lot of things—a lot of expensive things—and find out, after all, that she had not money enough to pay for them.' She had been thinking of what Mrs. Bellew had said overnight, when they were talking about her plans for the future, of the necessity there would be, when she was married, to be well dressed—not to disgrace her husband by her shabby clothes.

It had been running in her mind all the way—that, and what Mrs. Bellew had said about her looks—and the two together had made her alter her mind, and put off the shopping that she had planned.

'It will never do to buy common things, cheap things,' she reasoned, with Mrs. Bellew's words in her ears; 'they would soon get shabby, the gloss would soon wear off them, and they would look dowdy. Whatever else I do, I can never, never wear cheap vulgar finery! I must wait until I can afford something better.'

There was some reason in what Mrs. Bellew had said. Edith Darcy was not a girl—a woman, rather; she was twenty-nine, if she was a day—to wear common things. Her style of beauty—she had a distinct style in her way, and a certain sort of beauty—wanted careful dressing to set it off: it wanted costly stuffs, and rich dark colours, and unusual effects. There was nothing namby-pamby about it.

She was a pale brunette—not a brown or olive complexioned brunette of the regular type, but one with the clear white, rather thick white, complexion, that a sudden scarlet colour sets off to perfection. Her face was quite colourless to-day, as she leaned back against the dark

cushions of that first-class carriage. Edith always travelled first-class; it was one of her whims. She economized in a hundred other ways, but she always travelled luxuriously. She had never been in a third-class carriage in her life.

Her hair was black—as a brunette's hair should be—rather a rusty black, with red-brown shades in it, like the inner lining of a chestnut's skin, and her eyebrows were thin and dark and well defined, and she had long dark lashes, that veiled the softness, sometimes the hardness, of her eyes. Her eyes were dark—very dark—with a light in them that always seemed ready to flame up if occasion required. They were still, steady, reflective eyes—cold rather than warm—and they were set rather far back, which made her look older than she really was.

It was only when she was animated, when she woke up, that she was beautiful. To the world she was a cold, silent, reserved woman; she never

laid herself out for strangers ; her chilly smiles were few and rare, and she never wasted them on chance acquaintances ; but to her friends, to those who loved her, she was a woman to rave about.

She was not the sort of woman to be ill dressed ; she was made on noble lines—shabby gloves or a dowdy hat would have ill become her ; it would have dispelled all the illusion.

There was no one to meet her at the railway-station at St. Oswald's when she reached there, but, fortunately, there was a fly waiting outside the station, which an officious porter secured for her. Everybody waited upon Edith. It was another of her whims to pay liberally all the people about her who rendered her any service. She never came away from a visit at a country house without feeing all the servants in the most princely manner.

The hired fly from the station stopped at the door of one of the houses in the High Street —an old-fashioned red-brick house, standing in

an old-fashioned garden, surrounded by high brick walls. The iron gates in front were closed, and the fly had to wait outside while someone answered the bell to open them. Edith could hear the bell clanging in the hall, as she sat waiting in the fly; it had an old, cracked sound in it, as if it had grown tired of ringing. Everything about the place was old and worn out like the bell. Grass was growing in the gravelled path through which the carriage drove to the front-door; it did not look as if it had had any fresh gravel upon it for years; the flower-beds were neglected, and the shrubs on the lawn had grown into trees: they did not seem as if they had ever been pruned. There was a musty, shut-up smell about the place when the front-door was opened that did not speak well for the ventilation.

'We didn't expect you back so soon, Miss Edith,' the woman who opened the door said. She was rather an elderly woman; she did not look at all like a smart, modern housemaid.

'No; I forgot to write. I didn't think it mattered; my room is always ready. How is she?'

'She is better to-day: it is one of her good days. I dare say she will know you. She was full of the wedding yesterday. She has been talking about it all night, and this morning she woke up clearer. I hope you've brought her some wedding-cake.'

Edith's brow clouded.

'No,' she said; 'I forgot the cake. I did not think she would remember.'

'She remembers everything. She is quite counting upon the cake. You must tell her it is coming.'

Edith sighed. It was a very sad home-coming. There was no one to welcome her but a servant—an old servant who was not very glad to see her—and an elderly relative who was, as the people of St. Oswald's put it, 'off her head.'

The elderly relative was her great-aunt, her

father's aunt. Her father had been dead for years—he had died when she was a child—and her mother had died ten years ago. This old maiden aunt of her father's had offered her a home after the death of her parents; she had not offered her any care or protection—she had only offered her a home, food and shelter, and Edith had accepted her offer gladly. When she had nowhere else to go, she went to St. Oswald's.

She did not go there very often; she was generally away visiting. Everybody was so glad to have her; she could have gone on visiting at different country houses, and spent a season in town and a month in Scotland, and never come back to that dreary, shut-up old house from year's end to year's end, if she had wished.

She had an income of her own, not a very large income, and it found her in clothes and pin-money and paid her travelling expenses; and for the rest, her friends were very glad to

offer her a home. She had come back to St. Oswald's now to get her things ready—her wedding things; she would not be likely to go away again until she went away for good.

'Is she up to-day—is she in the sitting-room?' Edith asked wearily, as she went slowly up the stairs. She was not tired with her journey, not very, very tired—one doesn't soon get tired of travelling at thirty, and Edith was not yet thirty—but there seemed to be lead weights to her feet as she dragged them up the stairs.

The staircase was dark and gloomy, like the hall; the blinds were all drawn down over the windows; only a dim, chastened light came through them. It was a wide, old-fashioned staircase, with broad landings and carved balusters, and on the walls were hung quite a number of portraits—old family portraits of the Darcys and Gunnings.

Old Miss Gunning, Maria Gunning, was the present owner of the house. She never came

down the stairs—she had not been down them for years—but she walked on the landing, the broad passage at the top of the stairs. It was almost a gallery, a wide carpeted gallery, with old-fashioned inlaid cabinets standing between the tall narrow windows, and quaint carved Chippendale chairs, with ball feet and wide straddling arms and legs, standing against the wall, and the portraits of their former owners, those who had once sat in them, looking down from above.

Edith Darcy paused when she reached the top stair, as if she expected to see her aunt coming down the gallery. The blinds were closely drawn over all the tall windows. Miss Gunning objected to light; it was one of her whims. Edith would hardly have seen her if she had been there—not until her eyes had got accustomed to the gloom.

'She is in the bow-room to-day,' the servant called up after her, in answer to her question; and then Edith heard a door in the hall

below fall-to behind her, and the sound of the woman's footsteps echoing down a stone passage.

The bow-room was at the end of the gallery; she had to go past the closed windows and the tall cabinets against the wall to reach it. There was an old smell about the place, a faint aromatic odour; she always associated that smell with Gotham—Gotham House, as it was called. Something brushed by her as she went slowly down the gallery, something white and indistinct in the gloom, and it rubbed against her and purred. It was a white cat.

Edith opened the door at the end of the gallery; she did not knock—she opened the door and went in. There was a screen before the door, a high screen, and it shut out the light. There was very little light in the room to shut out. The gloom inside was deeper than the gloom without. If there had not been a small fire burning in the grate, Edith could not have seen the occupant of the room. By the

dim light she saw a figure in an armchair on one side of the hearth, a bent drooping figure, bending over the fire. She could not approach very near the fire ; there was a high wire guard surrounding the hearth, and the bent figure in the chair was leaning her forehead against the guard.

'It is I, Aunt Maria,' Edith said, coming forward into the firelight. 'I have come back.'

'Edith,' the old woman said, as if talking to herself—'Edith Gunning? What has brought her back? Why does she not stay with her husband? Has he sent her away? Is it the old story again—the old history repeating itself?'

'No, Aunt Maria, he has not sent her back. It is not Edith Gunning—it is Edith Darcy ; and—and I don't think her husband will ever send her back.'

Edith spoke gaily, but there was a little break in her voice. It was a sad home-coming.

No one was glad to see her. There was no one to welcome her but a white cat, which had followed her into the room, and was rubbing itself against her skirts.

CHAPTER III.

BLUE-EYE'S AUNT.

The old woman sitting by the fireplace lifted her head wearily and looked at Edith; she shaded her eyes with her hand that she might see her more clearly. They were dark, bright eyes, and they were set far back in her head, like Edith's. Her face was pale, too, like hers, only it was a chalky, waxen paleness, like one who had been long shut out from the light and air, who had been shut up for years in a living tomb. It was the paleness of age and decay, and Edith's was the fine white, warm paleness of youth. It was the same, with a difference.

'Edith Darcy!' the old woman repeated slowly, looking at Edith standing there in the firelight with her keen, searching eyes. 'Why should Edith Darcy come here? She has a home of her own—a home that ought to have been another's. Why does she come here like a beggar, and eat the bread of dependence?'

'I thought she was clearer to-day,' Edith said to an attendant, an elderly woman, who stood near; 'Martha told me it was one of her good days.'

'She has been dozing,' the woman said, 'and she has just woke up; she will remember you presently.—It is Miss Edith, ma'am; she has just come back from the wedding, and she has brought you some cake.'

'Cake!' the old woman said eagerly—'wedding-cake? Has she brought it with her? Is it here? Are they bringing it upstairs? Tell the men to carry it carefully, Penfold—not to shake the ornaments. There ought to be a temple upon it, the temple of Hymen, and

orange blossoms and garlands. There was a temple upon my wedding-cake, but something happened to it. It was an unlucky omen, people said. You must be very particular, Penfold, that nothing happens to it.'

'Nothing is likely to happen to it,' Penfold said in her prosaic, matter-of-fact way; she did not even take the trouble to humour the old woman's whim. 'Miss Edith has only brought you a slice—a slice of somebody else's cake. People would have enough to do if they sent a whole cake to each of their friends; there'd be less weddings, maybe.'

'Perhaps she'll remember me better presently, when she is quite awake,' Edith said. 'I am tired, and want some tea; I will come in again by-and-by.'

She had crossed the room, and was putting aside the screen before the door, when her aunt's voice arrested her, a high-pitched, quavering treble:

'Don't take Blue-Eye away! I can't give up

Blue-Eye! I have given up everything else, but I can't give up Blue-Eye!'

'Blue-Eye was in the gallery when I came in,' Edith said wearily; 'she came to meet me.'

'She was here just now—on my chair; it must have been Blue-Eye's aunt you saw in the gallery,' she said querulously. 'Will you find her, Penfold? You *must* find her.'

Edith went out of the room, and left the old woman searching for the cat. It was the chief occupation of her life to look for the cats.

Miss Gunning had not always been 'off her head,' as people described it. She had only shown symptoms of weakness of intellect for ten years past. She had lived a selfish, narrow, secluded life for years, but her mind had not given way until ten years ago. Perhaps it was the narrowness and the selfishness that made it give way.

She was quite herself, even now, at times—her old narrow self—but she was subject to de-

lusions. She was always fancying that the friends of her youth were about her, that her lover—she had had a lover once—was coming back. She had forgotten all about the intervening years: they seemed to have dropped out of her mind, and she had gone back in memory to the old early days, to sixty years ago It was not often that she knew Edith. She persisted in calling her Edith Gunning. There had been an Edith Gunning once—her younger sister, Edith's grandmother. It was said she had supplanted her—that her lover had forsaken her for her sister, and that he had deserted her, too, after a time, and she had come back to Gotham—she and her children. It was so long ago that no one knew if there were any truth in the story.

Edith Darcy had died more than fifty years ago. There was a marble monument to her in the parish church of St. Oswald's—a marble urn with a female figure weeping over it. She had been weeping there for over half a century,

and she was weeping still. No one knew who had put up that monument in the church; it was certainly not her sister Maria. She had left two children behind her—two boys. The elder, Edith's father, had died years ago, when she was a child, and left her with a slender provision; the younger brother was still living, a rich man, with a second wife and a houseful of children. Edith could have gone to him when her mother died, but she preferred to accept the home offered her by her great-aunt. She would not be in anybody's way at Gotham, and she would be more her own mistress; she would be free to come and go unquestioned.

She had come and gone during these lonely years, never remaining long, and always returning with regret and reluctance. The dull life, and the whims and delusions of the old woman, wearied her; she had no sympathy with them. She was always glad to go away. She comforted herself by thinking how soon she would

be going away again, and that she would never come back. She would not be like that other Edith Darcy, her unhappy namesake, who had come back after three years, a deserted wife, bringing her children with her. Whatever happened, she told herself, with a shiver, she would never come back.

Nothing was likely to happen. The man she was going to marry worshipped her; in the foolish old phrase, he loved the very ground she walked upon. Her only care just now was money; they would have so little to begin with. He would have his pay, and her allowance—her slender allowance—which would only just find her in clothes—decent clothes. If anything drove her back to Gotham it would be her poverty.

Miss Gunning was 'clearer,' as Penfold had predicted, when Edith came into the bow-room later, after she had had some tea. She was sitting upright in her chair, watching for the screen by the door to be pushed aside, and her niece

to enter; and the two white cats she had been in trouble about were asleep on the hearthrug.

There was a shaded lamp on the table near the door, which gave a circumscribed light in its own immediate neighbourhood, and left the rest of the room in shadow.

It was a spacious room, with a wide bow-window, from which it took its name. It was full of old-fashioned furniture—high-backed chairs, and wide couches, and tall cabinets ranged against the wall.

The same faint aromatic smell pervaded the room that pervaded the gallery outside, an old musty smell of *pot-pourri* that had been kept for years in a jar and had never been changed. There were big Oriental jars on the tall cabinets against the wall that might have been full of *pot-pourri* for half a century. But there were other things besides old china jars on the top of the cabinets; there were glass cases of cats—stuffed cats. In the dim light they could be

seen with their green shining eyes looking down from their high place.

They were all white cats, ancestors of the pair sleeping on the hearth. They had been Miss Gunning's companions for years; she had nothing else to love; she had neither husband nor children like other women, and her affections had centred in her cats. They were her companions when they were living, and when they died—they were rather a delicate race, or too much petting was not good for them—she could not consent to be separated from them: she still kept them about her, in glass cases round the walls.

In the dim light, with all those green eyes looking down upon her, Edith thought, with a shudder, it looked like a mausoleum—a mausoleum of cats. She had seen them all before—all but one. One had been added to the number since she had been away. Blue-Eye, the reigning favourite, had lost a sister, and she had been added to the company against the wall.

Edith had to listen to a long detailed account of the sufferings and death of the deceased member of her aunt's family. The story took a long time telling, and put the old lady in a good humour. It was astonishing how clear and exact she was; she did not leave out the smallest detail connected with her favourite's lamented demise. She had certainly not lost her memory; she was quite clear and sane about some things—she was always clear about the cats. She made Edith go round the room and look at the white, soft, fluffy creature she had known in the flesh; and Penfold held the light.

'It is very nice,' Edith said, not very ecstatically—she had no patience with her aunt's mania; 'but I shouldn't have known it: they are all so much alike.'

'You are not looking at the right one; that is not Blue-Eye's sister, it is her aunt!' the old woman said in an injured voice.

'Oh, I see; that is much nicer.' And

without bestowing a look on the dead favourite, Edith came back and sat down. She took a seat on the other side of the fireplace, opposite the bent figure in the chair, and like her she leant forward and rested her head against the brass guard that went round the hearth.

There was something in the action that made the resemblance between them more marked—the weary stoop of the shoulders, and the drooping head. Some day, if she lived to grow old—so old, over fourscore — if she outlived all her ties, Edith Darcy would shut herself up within four walls, and would set her affections, if she happened to have any left, upon cats.

Perhaps Edith thought of this as she leaned her head against the fire-guard. It was better, she told herself, to make a mistake, to marry upon nothing at all; to spend her life in pinching and scraping; to be exposed to daily humiliation and defeat; to have a thousand cares and anxieties; to endure sorrow

and loss—but to have the love of husband and children—it was better to suffer all this than to be a lonely, selfish old woman.

'You haven't told me about the wedding, the old woman said presently, interrupting her thoughts. 'I knew the Tremletts when I was a girl; they were connections, distant connections, of the Gunnings.'

'It was not a nice wedding,' Edith said, with a shiver; 'it rained all the time. The bride's dress was quite wet when she came back from church; she could shake the rain-drops off it.'

'Tears, tears! it is a sure sign,' Miss Gunning said, shaking her head. 'It rained the day that Edith Darcy was married. She went away in a storm; there was a tree blown down on the lawn; it lay across the path. What else could she expect?'

'It is a very good match for Dora,' Edith went on, not heeding the old woman's interruption, speaking more to herself than to a listener—she had a habit of speaking to her-

self, of thinking aloud. 'She will be the head of the family. Sir Bourchier is very infirm. She will be Lady Tremlett soon, and live at Castle Hill; it is the show-place of the county.'

'Sir Bourchier?' said the old woman with animation. 'I remember Sir Bourchier quite well; he was a young man when I knew him. Lady Tremlett had splendid diamonds. The Tremlett diamonds were noted; she used to wear them at the county balls.'

Then Edith remembered the diamond necklace that had so suddenly disappeared, that had been lost sight of.

'Captain Tremlett had them reset for Dora,' she said with a sigh. She was thinking of the value, of the ridiculous value, of those glittering stones that Dora despised—someone had said they were worth five thousand pounds. 'He had them set as a necklace.'

'Not all of them? There were so many. I remember quite well seeing Sir Bourchier's wife

wearing them—sprays, and tiara, and brooches. They could not be all put into a necklace.'

'There were a good many. I never saw so many diamonds crowded together before. It was a much too elaborate thing to wear. He had better have given them to her in their old setting.'

'The Gunning diamonds have never been reset,' the old woman said presently; 'they will never be reset in my time. Those that come after will do what they like with them. They used to be considered fine—none finer; perhaps they have lost their brilliance; they have not seen light for sixty years.'

This was the first mention that Edith had ever heard of the Gunning diamonds. She would not have heard it now if it had not been for Dora Tremlett's necklace.

She did not exactly gasp—she was not the girl to gasp—but she lifted her head from the fire-guard and listened. She listened breathlessly.

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'The Gunning diamonds?' she said, with a little catch in her voice.

'Yes,' the old woman said slowly, as if trying to recall the past; 'I wore them last. They have always been mine. I wore them at—at——'

She could not recall where she had last worn them, and the wretched little white cat stirring at her feet took off her attention.

'I am sure Blue-Eye has not had her supper, Penfold,' she said. 'She always goes to sleep after her supper, and she is very restless to-night; she can't settle.'

'She had her supper at the usual time,' Penfold said shortly. 'She'll settle when she's minded to.'

The white cat did not seem inclined to 'settle.' She walked about the room in a provoking manner, uttering every now and then ridiculous little plaintive 'mews,' like a spoilt child; and all the while Edith was on tenter-

hooks to hear more about the Gunning diamonds—the diamonds that might be hers some day. If they were heirlooms, if the law of entail applied to them, they ought to be hers now.

'Oh, Blue-Eye is all right!' she said impatiently. 'I dare say she hears a mouse somewhere; there must be a lot of mice in this old house. You were telling me about the diamonds——'

The old lady sat up in her chair. She was trembling all over.

'A mouse!' she repeated. 'Did you say a mouse? It was a mouse that killed her sister; it disagreed with her. Will you look, Penfold, if there is a mouse——'

Edith devoutly wished that Blue-Eye might share the fate of her sister, but she dissembled her feelings, and waited, with what patience she could, while Penfold searched under all the chairs and tables for an imaginary mouse. She waited in vain. Miss Gunning could not be

brought round to the subject of the diamonds again that night.

In her concern for that miserable white cat the recollection of the family diamonds went out of her mind—went out as suddenly as it had come in. They had been put away and forgotten for sixty years; nobody had ever heard of them; perhaps no one would ever hear of them again. They might be only creations of her disordered brain.

The following morning Edith received a letter from Mrs. Bellew. The diamond necklace had not been found. Dora had not taken it away. She was in great distress about it, and begged Edith to try to remember the last occasion on which it was seen—in whose possession she last saw it, and when.

Later in the day she had a telegram from Dora herself.

'I am in dreadful trouble,' Dora telegraphed, 'about the necklace. Can you think what has become of it?'

Edith was thinking about the necklace all the day. She could not get it out of her mind. She could not remember for certain where she had last seen it—if she had seen it on the morning of the wedding, when the case was brought downstairs to be put among the other presents, or if she had seen it last the night before, when she carried it upstairs. She had carried it up and brought it down herself, and she had stayed behind to lock the door of the iron safe upon it.

She sat down and wrote a long letter to Mrs. Bellew, and another to Dora, and she told them each what she remembered about the missing necklace. She could not believe that it was lost.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BOW-ROOM.

EDITH DARCY was still full of the missing necklace when she went into Miss Gunning's room in the evening. The old lady had not been so well to-day, and she had been full of fancies. When she was full of fancies, the doctor prescribed perfect quiet; the presence of a stranger only excited her. Edith would not have gone to her then, but she sent for her; she had been inquiring for her all the day.

She was sitting in the same place where Edith had left her the night before, with her head against the wire guard, and the cats

sleeping on the rug at her feet. Nothing in the aspect of the room was changed.

She did not lift up her head when Edith came into the room, but went on talking to herself in a low tone.

'She is not so clear to-day,' Penfold whispered to Edith, as she took her seat, her old seat, on the opposite side of the fireplace. 'She has been talking of her diamonds all night; she wants to put them on. I am sure I don't know where she keeps 'em. I've never seen any diamonds, and I've lived with her thirty years.'

'Perhaps she is only wandering,' Edith said, with a sigh.

'If she'd had any, the trustees would have taken charge of 'em. They have locked up most things, and taken away the keys—everything that is of value.'

'Yes,' she said absently, 'I suppose they would know.'

She was wondering whether it would be

worth while to apply to the trustees and ask about the diamonds, the family diamonds, which ought of rights to be hers. If they were heirlooms, they would descend to her through her father, who was the eldest male descendant of the Gunnings. They could not possibly go to the younger son. If they were hers, and she could claim them, what a windfall it would be! They could not have come to her at a better time.

She thought of all this as she sat leaning her head against the fire-guard, listening to the old woman's disjointed talk. She would not have listened to it at any other time, but she listened to-day. In spite of her preoccupation, she did not lose a word that the old woman was saying. Who could tell what clue she might let drop, now that her mind was running on the subject? It had been a sealed subject for sixty years, and now it had come to light. No one living had ever heard of the Gunning diamonds. It was like discovering a buried treasure.

Edith could not glean anything from her wandering talk, though she listened intently. It was about places and people she had never heard of, who were dead before she was born; but the name of Edward Darcy dropped from her lips more than once. She was so full of the past, the old days, that she did not pay any attention to her favourites to-night; she let them prowl about the room unnoticed.

The candles burnt low—there had only been candles lit to-night, two wax candles at the farther end of the room—and Penfold sat yawning behind her mistress. Edith could see her yawning whenever she looked up.

'You are tired to-night, Penfold,' she said kindly—she was always considerate to servants; 'you will be glad to go to bed.'

'Yes,' the woman said, suppressing a yawn, 'I shan't be sorry. I have hardly left the room a moment to-day. When the candles are burnt out she will go to bed.'

The candles were Penfold's clock. They were

cut a certain length, and when they were burnt out it was time to go to bed. There were several clocks in the room, a bracket clock in an inlaid tortoiseshell buhl case against the wall, and a variety of timepieces on the cabinets, and one over the mantelpiece; but none of them were going: they had not gone for years. It was one of Miss Gunning's whims not to have them wound up. They all pointed to different hours, the hours they had stopped at. The bracket clock had stopped at five minutes to twelve. It had never pointed to any other hour since Edith could remember.

'They will not have burnt out yet,' Edith said, looking at the slowly wasting candles; 'if you like to go downstairs for half an hour, I will stay here till you come back.'

'If you are sure you don't mind waiting, miss—and you won't leave her a minute—and you'll touch the bell if I'm wanted, I should like to have a breath of air,' Penfold said, getting up. 'She's quiet now; she'll go on

talking to herself till I come back. She's not likely to want anything; if she does, you'll be sure to ring, miss.'

'I'll be sure to ring,' Edith said reassuringly. 'I don't think there will be any necessity, but if she is restless I will ring.'

When Miss Gunning's maid had left the room, and closed the door behind her, Edith tried an experiment.

'It is very sad about Dora Tremlett's necklace,' she said abruptly; 'I have heard to-day that it is lost.'

'Necklace? what necklace?' Miss Gunning asked, stopping in the midst of her disjointed talk.

'The diamond necklace that Captain Tremlett gave his bride for a wedding present. It has disappeared most mysteriously. The bride was wearing it the night before the wedding, and the next day it was gone.'

'Gone?' the old woman repeated; 'where did it go?'

She had quite woke up now; Edith had succeeded in arousing her attention.

'No one knows. It disappeared. I—I wonder whether the Gunning diamonds are gone too? It is years since you saw them; perhaps they, too, have disappeared.'

She could hardly keep her voice steady; it seemed her only chance.

'I have not seen them for—for sixty years!' said Miss Gunning, sitting up, and striking her stick upon the floor; she always kept her stick beside her chair; she could not walk an inch without it.

'They may be gone now,' Edith said desperately. 'No one can tell what has happened to them during these sixty years. Dora only lost sight of her diamonds a single night, and the next day they were gone.'

'Gone!' the old woman repeated—'gone! gone! There has been no one to take them; they would not have known where to find them.'

'There was no one to take Dora's necklace—it was locked up in a safe; but it was gone the next day.'

The old woman struck her stick on the floor impatiently, and began fumbling among the folds of her dress, as if she were searching for something.

'You want your keys?' Edith said eagerly, interpreting the motion; 'you are looking for your keys?'

Miss Gunning nodded her head.

'They were here just now,' she said weakly; 'I always keep them here.'

She was fumbling about her waist and the folds of her dress, as if feeling for something. Edith remembered all at once, as she sat watching her, a portrait she had seen of her aunt, that hung still in one of the rooms below. It had been taken in the days of her youth—a half-length portrait of a lady in a yellow dress, with a châtelaine by her side. One of the long white hands in the portrait was toying with the

châtelaine. Edith knew in a moment what her aunt was feeling for; the association with the hidden gems had taken her back to the days of her youth, to the old châtelaine that she used to wear, which had been laid aside for fifty years.

'Do you think you could find them if you had the key?' she said eagerly.

The old woman was still fumbling at her side; she was not feeling for a pocket—it was worn more forward in her days. She would not have had to go far to find it; it would not have taken the hour's searching for that *fin-de-siècle* pockets take; besides, it was not the movement that one makes to find a pocket.

'It used to be here,' she said meditatively; 'it was always here; it has never been off the chain.'

'The key — the key of the cabinet where the diamonds are?' Edith asked breathlessly.

The old woman nodded her head.

'It was on the chain,' she said; 'it never left my side.'

She was still feeling for it when Penfold came into the room.

CHAPTER V.

EDITH DARCY'S DREAM.

EDITH could not rest until she had seen the portrait that she had in her mind. She wanted to be sure about the châtelaine.

When the household had sunk into sleep—they kept early hours at Gotham—Edith softly descended the stairs with a taper in her hand. They creaked beneath her soft footsteps, and sent ghostly sounds travelling through the silent house, while the old Gunnings on the walls gloomed down upon her from their dingy frames. The big cavernous drawing-room looked as dark and chill as a vault by the light of her single taper. She shivered as the

door fell-to behind her, and she stood in the midst of the blackness, with a great company of chairs and couches reaching out their white ghostly arms to her. The furniture of the room was white and gold, and the walls were white, with some faded gilding upon it. The room had been shut up so long that the gilding on the walls and on the chairs and tables had faded, and what had once been white was now yellow with age.

The light of the taper that Edith carried seemed only to make the gloom deeper. The white walls and the white arms of the furniture seemed to come out of the gloom to meet her, and the portraits in their tarnished frames peered out of the darkness as she threw the feeble flicker of her taper upon them one by one. She found the one she wanted, and went hurriedly over to it, holding her light aloft.

It was the newest portrait in the old room; it had not been painted more than sixty years. A flat, colourless picture: the yellow dress

looked colourless in the candlelight. A proud, beautiful face, with dark eyes looking coldly down, and thin scarlet lips tightly drawn. The Gunnings were all of one type—white and cold, with a hidden fire smouldering beneath their stately calm.

Edith was quite right about the châtelaine. She could not see it very well in that light—it looked like a colourless daub of paint; there was something hanging beside the slim waist of the woman in the picture—something with pendent chains—though she could not make out what was hanging to the chains. They were indistinct blobs of paint. The artist, whoever he was, had not been brought up in the school of the pre-Raphaelite painters.

She was wondering all through the night—she could not go to sleep for thinking of it—what had become of her aunt's silver châtelaine. Most likely the trustees had carried it away, or locked it up with the other things. They had removed everything of value, and put it in safe

keeping; and they had set seals on the locks of all the drawers and cabinets. They had left nothing about; they had taken possession of everything.

Poor old Miss Gunning used to say sometimes, in her sane moments—and she was as sane as the Vice-Chancellor himself at times—that she had fallen asleep, and woke up to find herself in the hands of lawyers and doctors.

She had no more authority over the disposal of her own property than a stranger. Everything had been taken from her and put away; if she were not exactly a prisoner in her own house, she was a pensioner, living on the money that was doled out month by month by her lawyers, of the expenditure of which an account had to be rendered.

Edith thought of all this as she lay awake, wondering where that châtelaine might be. It was not in her aunt's power to make a provision for her, not the slenderest provision at her approaching marriage — not even a wedding

present. She knew this quite well; but if the family jewels were not in the hands of the trustees, she might give her the diamonds. They were hers by right—at least, they were her father's.

She fell asleep revolving the question of the whereabouts of the châtelaine, and it was not, perhaps, remarkable that she should dream about it. Dreams, if we could trace them back, are echoes of our waking thoughts, with this strange difference—that they reach farther than thought itself, and pierce the veil which we are unable when awake to raise by a single inch.

Edith dreamed the exact locality of her aunt's châtelaine.

If she had been a medium, she could not have described its hiding-place more accurately.

'It is in the oak chest in the gallery, at the bottom of the chest, among the dresses,' she found herself repeating, as if it had been a lesson she had learnt, when she awoke.

She kept repeating it all the time she was

dressing; she was not at all sure that there was anything in it, but she hurried over her dressing, to see for herself if her dream were true.

She knew the chest in the gallery quite well. It was an old oak chest, with some carving over the front, and a panelled lid. It had been locked as long as she could remember, but she recollected once, years ago, when a child, seeing it open. It was when a party of young people were staying in the house, and there were some theatricals going on, and those who took part in them were arrayed in some old-fashioned gowns that were found in the chest.

She must have been quite a young child at the time, for she could not remember the theatricals; she could only recollect seeing the chest open, and the gowns taken out.

Most likely, she told herself, the trustees had locked the chest and taken away the key, as they had carried away all the other keys.

She asked Penfold about it after breakfast,

when she met her coming out of Miss Gunning's room.

Penfold shook her head; she could not remember to have seen it for years. There was nothing in the chest, she assured her, but old-fashioned gowns—gowns that had belonged to her great-grandmother. They had not seen the light for over twenty years; most likely the moth had eaten them all up.

Then Edith had to dissemble. It was for the sake of the old fashions that she wanted to see the gowns, she told Penfold. She was going to act in some charades, and she wanted an old-fashioned dress. Nothing could be better than one of the old moth-eaten gowns that had belonged to her great-grandmother.

Penfold put herself out of the way to look for the key; she had a 'rummage' for it, as she termed it, after Miss Gunning was dressed and she had got her into the bow-room. Edith sat with her aunt while Penfold 'rummaged.'

It was not often that Miss Gunning's maid put

herself out of the way to oblige her mistress's niece. She looked upon her as an interloper. Whatever might come to her at her aunt's death, she was only here on sufferance now. Nothing in the place belonged to her ; she could not take a book out of the house without the permission of the trustees.

Penfold remembered quite well having seen the key of the chest about, not very recently, but since the action of the trustees. She remembered the chest being opened by them and the contents examined, and the gentlemen walking away and leaving it open. The contents were part of an old woman's wardrobe ; they had nothing to do with the estate. When the trustees had gone away, Penfold locked the chest and put the key in a place of safety. Wherever it was, it was where she had put it.

It took a good deal of looking for. While Edith was about it, she might as well have dreamed where the key of the chest was, as well as the châtelaine.

Penfold did not find the key until the afternoon. It was not until near sunset that Edith got an opportunity of looking over the things in the chest. She did not care to go through it —she would have to go quite to the bottom, beneath all the dresses—while the maids were about, and they were coming and going on some errand or another to Miss Gunning's room all the afternoon. They were out of the way at last, safe out of the way for a good hour, gossiping over their tea in the servants' hall, and Penfold was shut up with her mistress.

There was not much in the oak chest to lock up so carefully—nothing but a lot of old-fashioned gowns of a past age, fit only to use for dressing up in charades. They were scarcely fit for that, for the moth had got into them and riddled them into holes ; if they remained there much longer they would be quite eaten up.

Edith's hands trembled when she came near the bottom of the box and had found nothing. She threw all the things out in a heap upon the

floor—a heap of faded, discoloured rags. They had no doubt been admired in their time, and had been put on with pride and joy, and laid aside with regret. Who should say what high hopes had beat beneath those ridiculous short-waisted bodies, what joys and alarms had fluttered the tender breasts under those faded tags and laces ?

Edith did not give a thought to this as she went hurriedly through the contents of the oak chest. She had come to the bottom, quite to the bottom, when she came upon the yellow gown that she knew so well—the yellow gown in the picture.

She took it out with a trepidation she could not account for. It had got crushed and discoloured with lying by, and the puffs and furbelows, that were almost grotesque in their dimensions in the picture, were quite flat.

There was nothing beneath the yellow gown; it was the last thing in the chest ; it was quite empty when she took it out.

'There was nothing in the dream after all,' Edith told herself impatiently.

She shook the gown in her hand, as she was accustomed to shake out her own dresses after a journey, when they had got crushed with being tightly packed in a trunk, and as she was shaking it something fell out.

It was the châtelaine, which had been hidden away in the folds of the yellow gown. When Penfold came out of the room to see how she was getting on, Edith was putting the things back into the chest.

'There are no dresses here that are of any use to me,' she said. 'You can put them all in again, Penfold, and return the key to where you found it.'

When Penfold had gone down to her supper in the servants' hall, Edith showed Miss Gunning the treasure she had discovered.

'Do you remember this, Aunt Maria?' she said, laying the châtelaine in the old woman's lap. 'Is this what you were looking for?'

Miss Gunning was sitting in her usual attitude, with her head leaning forward upon her breast, and she was dozing. She dozed a good deal during the day. She fell asleep in a minute, in the midst of talking, and she woke up just as suddenly. She woke up now when Edith put the châtelaine in her lap.

'Ye-es,' she said, fingering it with tremulous eagerness. 'How should I forget it? I always wear it. I could not do without it. My keys —where are my keys? They were here yesterday——'

Then Edith's heart sank. One of the chains was broken; whatever had once hung upon it had been taken away. There were only a few trinkets left hanging upon it—a gilt needle-case, a pair of rusty scissors, and a little twisted key.

'Here is a key, Aunt Maria, a dear little key; what is it the key of?' she said with breathless eagerness.

She couldn't understand dreaming about it,

having been favoured with a distinct revelation, and nothing coming of it.

'This?' the old woman said, shading her eyes with her hand, and looking at the little gilt key against the light. 'I ought to know—I use it every day——'

'Where do you use it?' Edith asked, in a voice she could not keep steady. 'Is it the key—of—of the case where the diamonds are kept—the Gunning diamonds?'

The old woman nodded.

'Is it in this room?'

The old woman looked slowly round the room, shading her eyes with her hand, though the light was dim—only the light of the two wax candles burning in the sconces at the farther end of the room. Edith watched her. For a moment her eyes seemed to linger in a corner—a recessed corner—near the window, upon one of the tall bureaus against the wall—an old-fashioned marqueterie bureau with fanciful designs inlaid in coloured woods. It

had a round sloping top and slender legs; Edith never remembered having seen it opened.

She jumped up from her seat suddenly, when she saw where Miss Gunning's eyes were lingering, and went over to it; she was trembling all over.

'Is it here?' she said in her low, eager voice, 'is it the key of this?'

The old woman did not answer; she sat shading her eyes, and looking in a bewildered way round the room.

'Will you try?'

She never knew how it happened: it all happened in a moment. The old woman had risen from her seat, and was hobbling across the room. She was leaning upon her stick, and walking without help—she generally wanted a good deal of supporting on each side. Edith had not seen her walking alone for years—she had always leaned for support on another—but to-day she was walking alone.

Miss Gunning came over to the marqueterie

bureau where Edith was standing. It seemed to her that the old woman was crossing the room alone by some mysterious hypnotism in answer to her call; that she had compelled her by force of will—that she had no alternative.

'Here is the lock,' she said; 'shall I open it for you?'

Miss Gunning had brought over the châtelaine, and she fumbled helplessly for the key—the key she had come to try. Edith found it for her, and put it in the lock, which it fitted perfectly. It was a very curious old twisted key; it could only have been made to fit one lock.

'Will you turn it, or shall I?' she asked in a dry voice that sounded to her like another's.

The old woman essayed to turn the key with her weak, shaking fingers; but they had no strength in them, and Edith turned it in the lock, and the bureau fell open.

It was exactly like a thousand other old

pieces of furniture of the same date; there were the usual number of pigeon-holes and drawers, and the little locked cupboard in the middle that always gives promise of some hidden treasure.

There was no treasure hidden behind the little inlaid door, for the lock was broken and the door was off its hinges. There were a lot of papers inside, dusty old papers tied up in bundles, and some letters scattered about; and there was a faint, musty air of some pungent odour that had years ago hung about those yellow missives. It had been a perfume once, but now it was like the musty odour of a newly opened tomb.

Miss Gunning put aside the papers—she did not even look at them, she tossed them aside impatiently--and Edith saw that the space within was empty, quite empty; there was nothing concealed there. She did not speak—she would not have spoken for the world—but she watched and waited.

And while she waited the lean, trembling fingers were fumbling inside the empty space; they were feeling for something, but there was nothing visible—nothing that Edith's straining eyes could see. There was a sliding sound, the faint creak of a shifting panel, and the floor of the recess had slid aside, and revealed an aperture beneath.

It was a hiding-place that no one would have suspected. There were some loose packages inside; not a casket or case of any kind, but some loose packages. The groping fingers dived into the aperture, and brought out a package, and unwrapped it with feeble haste. It was a miniature, Edith saw—the portrait of a man—and it was set with diamonds. She could see them flashing in that dim light, as Miss Gunning took it out of the wrapper.

She started back with a feeble cry when she had taken it out of the wrapper, and pushed it away from her.

'I did not think to see it again,' she said, or

rather moaned. 'Oh! why did you make me take it out? It should have been Edith's, not mine; he was her husband, not mine.'

She pushed the papers hurriedly back, but she did not close the sliding panel in her haste, and hobbled painfully back to her chair.

She had got so infirm in those few moments that Edith had to support her; she could not have reached her chair without help. There was only time to hastily close the bureau, and go to the old woman's help; and she had scarcely got her back to her chair, when Penfold came up from her supper.

Miss Gunning was trembling all over when Penfold came back, and she was muttering to herself.

'Edith's husband, not mine,' she was saying under her breath; 'mine, if Edith had not come between us. She had her reward—she had her reward.'

It was always a consolation to her that the ill-fated Edith had had her reward.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GUNNING DIAMONDS.

The marqueterie bureau containing the diamonds —the diamonds that Edith was dying to see— was unlocked, and the key was in her possession. She had slipped the châtelaine out of sight when Penfold came into the room; she had only just slipped it out of sight in time. She could not lock the bureau until Miss Gunning had gone to bed, and taken Penfold away with her.

It seemed to Edith that her aunt would never go to bed, that she would sit there muttering to herself all night.

She went at last, and left Edith staring into

the fire, with one of the white cats on her lap. Blue-Eye's aunt had conceived an affection for her mistress's niece—an unrequited affection. Edith was nursing her to-night; it was something to do, to smooth her soft fur and pull her ears; it kept her nervous fingers from betraying their impatience.

When Miss Gunning and her maid had gone at last, Edith jumped up quickly and went over to the bureau. She jumped up so quickly that Blue-Eye's aunt was deposited in a most unfeeling way on the floor.

The miniature in its sparkling frame was on the top of the heap of papers, where Miss Gunning had flung it down. Edith took it up eagerly; it was her grandfather's likeness, the only likeness she had ever seen of him; but that did not account for her eagerness. It was set in gold, as a miniature, and outside the original gold setting was the brilliant frame. The frame did not belong to it; it was complete without it. Edith remarked this as she stood

examining it by the light of the wax candles, which were already burning low in their sockets. She could not see it very well, as the candles were at the other end of the room, and she closed the bureau and went over to the light to see it better. While she was still standing there, with the miniature in her hand, she heard the handle of the door turn and someone come in. She had only time to slip the miniature in her pocket before Penfold pushed aside the screen. She had come back for something that her mistress had left behind, and she looked suspiciously at Edith standing blushing guiltily beneath the light. Edith felt herself getting hot, and felt the unwonted colour rushing to her face. She had nothing to be ashamed of, she told herself, that she should get crimson like a thief because a waiting-maid had surprised her.

When Penfold had left the room, she was too shaken to attempt any more discoveries that night. She pushed back the panel and heaped

a bundle of letters above it, and locked the bureau. She did not put back the miniature; she wanted to examine it at leisure in her own room, and she took it away with her—the miniature and the châtelaine.

As she crossed the room, she was conscious of an uncomfortable feeling—something rubbed against her and startled her. She was so ridiculously nervous, that it was as much as she could do to keep herself from crying out. It was only Blue-Eye's aunt rubbing against her, and all the white cats on the walls were looking down upon her, and watching her with their glassy eyes.

In the seclusion of her own room, Edith examined the miniature.

It was the likeness of a man of twenty-five or thirty-five—of any age—a *blasé* man, with a blonde moustache and fair, wavy hair, which he wore long, and falling, in the fashion of the day, over his forehead. Distinctly a handsome man, but not a face to trust—a selfish,

sensual face, with not a line of self-denial in it.

But it was not the face that Edith was so deeply interested in; she could not be expected to care much for her grandfather who had died thirty years before she was born. It was the setting of the miniature that Edith was examining so eagerly. It was an old-fashioned open setting of brilliants, and it was too big for the portrait it enclosed. It was of much earlier date than the plain gold setting of the miniature, and had been rather clumsily adapted to it.

Edith was unconsciously trying to make it fit—the clumsy contrivance jarred upon her—when the miniature slipped out of the frame upon the floor, and left the glittering circle of brilliants in her hand. There was something else on the floor when she stooped to pick it up—one of the brilliants had fallen out, too, and lay glittering at her feet. The silver setting had been bent to make it fit the

miniature, and the delicate filigree work had given way, and several of the stones were loose.

'If these were real,' Edith told herself, as she shook the loose stones out of the frame upon her dressing-table, 'they would be worth a good deal. If Dora Tremlett's necklace was worth thousands of pounds, these would be worth something—hundreds of pounds, perhaps; who could say?'

She turned quite pale at the thought; then a dreadful fear came into her mind. Suppose they were paste? There was a great deal of paste worn in the days of the First Empire. People went to Court in paste buckles, and great ladies were not above wearing paste—real old French paste—on their persons. It was quite possible that this likeness-frame was only set with paste.

Edith set that dreadful doubt at rest the following day.

She went up to town early in the morning;

she started before the post came in—before the letters were delivered at Gotham House. If she had waited for her letters, perhaps she might have changed her plans. There was a letter from Mrs. Bellew, Dora's mother, in the bag, about the lost necklace. Captain Tremlett was making a great fuss about it. He had communicated with the police, and detectives had been sent down from London to Hereford to make inquiries. They had found out nothing as yet, but they had made a great many inquiries. They had inquired, among other things, about Miss Darcy, the young lady who locked them up in the safe in Mrs. Bellew's dressing-room, and who had brought them down in the morning. Perhaps she could give some information they lacked ; at any rate, they had asked for her address, which Mrs. Bellew could not very well withhold. She hoped her 'dear Edith' would not mind, and that they would not trouble her very much ; something was said about an interview. If the men called, she

hoped 'darling Edith' would not mind telling them all she knew. It was only a matter of form; the inquiries had to be made before the men could do anything. For her own part, she was sick of the necklace; she had been almost worried to death about it.

Edith was in ignorance of this letter, and of the visit that was to be made to her, when she started on that misty autumn morning for town. She arrived in London quite early, and she had the day before her. She had a good deal to do; she would not have a minute to spare. She had a lot of shopping to do—the shopping she had put off when she came up to town after the wedding; she could not put it off any longer. There were all the things for her trousseau to buy. If she were to be married in October, she had no time to lose.

Before she bought her wedding things, she wanted to arrange about the money. It would be ridiculous to launch out into extravagant purchases, and have only her allowance to meet

it with—to cripple herself for years to come at a time when she would want the money most, when she could not spare a penny of it. On the other hand, she could not marry without a trousseau. She could not go to the man she loved with only the clothes she stood upright in. It was indispensable, if there were to be a wedding, that she should have proper clothes, that she should not disgrace her husband by her shabbiness. Besides, as has been already hinted, she was no longer in her first youth; the attractions of girlhood had left her, and she looked old for her years. It was of the highest importance that she should be well dressed; it was an absolute necessity.

In the face of all this there was but one thing to be done—to get money from somewhere. Get money! It is so easy to say, 'Get money'—but how?

Edith was asking herself the question all the way up to town on that misty autumn morning. She had the railway-carriage all to herself, and

she thought of nothing but that vexed question of ways and means as the misty fields and the hedges slipped by her ; she was thinking what she should say in that interview she had arranged with her trustee, and, in the event of his being obdurate, what she should do.

She drove straight from the station to Lincoln's Inn. The interview was fixed for ten o'clock, and she reached there before the time appointed. If there is one thing in the world more disagreeable than being late at an appointment—an unpleasant appointment—it is being too early ; sitting amid painfully suggestive surroundings, in a depressing atmosphere, going over beforehand the impending interview ; feeling one's spirit and courage and independence slipping away, and all the fine things one was going to say getting hopelessly mixed.

Edith sat waiting in a dark office for Mr. Tulkington's appearance—Mr. Tulkington was

her trustee under her father's will—until everything she had come to say had slipped from her memory, and she felt herself getting dazed and bewildered, and her courage had oozed out at her fingers'-ends.

She had to wait in that dreary office an hour, staring at the empty grate, and the maps on the wall—maps or charts—and the row of tin boxes on the shelves, with names painted in white letters upon them—the names of Mr. Tulkington's clients. There was no tin box with the name of 'Darcy' upon it on the shelves. Perhaps she was not a sufficiently important client; the papers relating to her insignificant affairs could be stuffed into a pigeon-hole.

Mr. Tulkington came in in a great bustle; he had two or three people waiting for him, and he had not much time to spare for Edith. He was not an old-fashioned gallant lawyer, who had always nice courtly speeches ready to soften the asperities of the law to his fair clients.

He was a grumpy old man, and he had an unpleasant habit of looking at his watch every few minutes if an interview wearied him.

'I was detained,' he said by way of apology, when he came in and found that Edith had been waiting there an hour for him. 'I was called in a hurry to execute a document, and I could not get away before. I had to wait for a signature; the man died a moment after he had signed it, while I was there. It was important that I should have seen him sign it.'

Edith shivered. She had the picture of the dying man propped up to sign that document, and the people—the hungry relatives—crowding eagerly round the bed, waiting for his signature, before her eyes all through the interview.

'It's a will I've come to see you about, Mr. Tulkington,' she began with some hesitation—'my father's will. I want you to read it over,

and see—if—if it admits of any advance being made to me—only a small advance—out of the principal.'

The lawyer shook his head.

'I have no need to read it, Miss Edith; I remember the terms of the will quite well. It is not often I accept a trust, a personal trust, but I accepted it to oblige your father. I am not likely to forget. The provisions of the will put it out of my power to make an advance, to advance one penny beyond the payment of the interest. You have that regularly, Miss Edith——'

'Yes, I have that, such as it is,' Edith interrupted bitterly. 'It is not a fourth of what it was at my mother's death, and it has been growing less and less every year. If it goes on dwindling as it has done, there will soon be nothing left.'

'You must blame the rupee, the depreciation in the rupee, and the failure of the colonial banks, my dear young lady—not me,' the

lawyer said, rubbing his hands together as if he were washing them.

It was a little habit he had. He was mixed up with so many people's concerns, and when they were troublesome he washed his hands of them.

'I am not blaming anyone,' Edith said meekly; 'it is my luck. Everything slips through my fingers. But just now I have an —an urgent, a special need for money, for a little advance—say a hundred pounds.'

'If it were a hundred pence I could not go beyond the terms of the will,' the lawyer said, and then he took out his watch.

Edith knew exactly what that meant, and she came to the point.

'I am going to be married, Mr. Tulkington,' she said, and a fine blush spread over her pale face. 'I am going to be married in a few weeks, and I want the money to buy my wedding clothes.'

He ought to have been touched by the

appeal ; he ought to have sat down and written a cheque for a hundred pounds, for five hundred pounds, immediately. He did nothing of the kind. His heart was as hard as a flint, and as rough as Esau's hand.

'I am sorry I can't help you, Miss Edith,' he said, washing his hands of the trousseau she was pleading for—washing them with decided relish ; 'I can't go beyond my client's instructions. There is no provision made in the will for such an event ; the interest will continue to be paid to you after your marriage the same as before.'

'But surely I can have the interest, twelve months' interest, in advance ? There will be no risk in that, and it will not be exceeding your instructions.'

Edith pleaded desperately.

'There would be great risk in anticipating your income ; it would never do !' the old lawyer said, shaking his head. 'You might die meanwhile, and there would be no security ;

the principal would go at once to Mr. Richard Darcy's children. There are seven of them, I believe—seven or ten; they would not be likely to recognise a liability—an unwarrantable liability—on the estate. Why not apply to your uncle, Mr. Richard, for assistance?'

Edith shook her head.

'We are not very good friends,' she said, with a thrill of nervous impatience in her voice. 'I should not under any circumstances apply for help to my uncle's family.'

She rose to go as she finished speaking; it was no use prolonging the interview: the old man was evidently not going to help her.

'I hope I may congratulate you upon its being a desirable match; that, this initial difficulty of the trousseau being overcome, there will be no further cause for anxious thought on the subject of ways and means?' he said, as he went to the door with her.

It was not very clearly put, but Edith understood him.

'Then, I'm sure you may not congratulate me,' she said brusquely; 'for there will be cause for very anxious thought on the subject of ways and means. I am marrying a man without a penny.'

With this Parthian dart she took her leave, and left the dried-up little lawyer on his door-step washing his hands of his improvident client.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE STORES.

After that interview with her trustee, Edith Darcy could have sat down on the first doorstep she came to in Lincoln's Inn and wept. The spectacle would have been an unusual one at that hour of the morning : a high-bred, haughty young lady—she looked distinctly haughty, though her heart was in her boots—dressed in the height of the prevailing fashion, wailing upon the doorstep of her family solicitor, or of somebody else's family solicitor.

Perhaps she was not the only woman who had felt inclined to weep when she left those doors—who had wanted to creep away

into some quiet corner and let her tears have free course. There ought to be a wailing-place near all the courts of law, and the chambers of those who interpret the law, where unhappy clients who have suffered wrong, and can find no redress, might ease their over-burdened hearts before they go their way and get lost in the common crowd. The Jews of old had wailing-places, where people, whose feelings were not under control, could make as much noise as they liked, without being requested to 'move on.'

Edith did not wait to be requested to 'move on'; she went on her way—on foot. She had suddenly remembered a little business she had in the City. If this interview with her trustee had been propitious she might not have remembered it.

The business took some time to transact, and when it was over Edith did her shopping. She bought most of the things she wanted for her trousseau. She knew exactly what things

she wanted, and she knew exactly where to get them.

When she had bought her clothes she looked at some furniture; she did not buy it—she looked at it. When she had finished her shopping she kept another appointment—her appointment with her lover. She had crammed a good deal into that busy day, and love was reserved to the last, to crown it all.

She met him in the Army and Navy Stores. Perhaps there is no place in London where a meeting, a meeting between lovers, can be more conveniently arranged than at 'the Stores.' It is private, but not too private, and there is always an air of chance meeting, of mere accident, if one happens to come across a mutual friend. It is not like meeting in the Park or at a picture-gallery; there is no design in it, and the absence of a chaperon is not remarked.

Edith was sitting at one of the little tables in the tea-room, consulting her tablets, when

her lover came in. He knew exactly where to find her; he came straight to her.

He came to her with his eyes shining, and a look on his face that no one could mistake. Everyone must have seen that he was a lover. There were a good many people in the tea-room, and they all looked up when he entered, and the girls watched him go over to that corner by the window where Edith was sitting looking at her tablets. They couldn't think what he could see in that dowdy girl, with her pale, proud face and her absent, preoccupied air. But she was pale no longer, nor preoccupied; a transformation had come over her, one of her sudden transformations, and her cheeks were glowing, and a new light had come into her eyes. The sudden colour that came into her cheeks was so bright that anyone who had seen them a minute ago would have said that she had painted them. The colour of her eyes had changed, too; they were such a varying shade of black, or brown, or hazel, that one

could never tell their exact hue ; but her beautiful black eyebrows and black lashes made them look dark at all times. Her eyes did not change their colour for everybody, and Nature did not paint her cheeks with that rich carmine for every comer—she was more sparing of her colours—hence it was not remarkable that few people could understand what Captain Stanhope could see in Miss Darcy.

Perhaps he saw something in the woman he loved that nobody else saw—an ideal of his own, a high ideal—or he wouldn't have fallen down and worshipped it. He saw nothing in Edith but perfection ; he had never met with a woman so perfect in his eyes. She did not come up to his standard of woman ; she created it.

He was a big, bashful, slow-witted fellow with a military bearing, standing over six feet in his shoes, with the shoulders and limbs that a man of six feet should have.

His closely-cut hair was light brown, with a

distinct wave in it; he wore a light moustache, and his eyes were gray, a rather steely-blue gray, and steady; there was not a twinkle of fun in them; he took everything *au sérieux*. His face, which had been fair, was tanned with foreign service; his regiment had not long returned from India.

He came towards Edith, sitting in her corner, with his eyes shining, and his heart beating high.

'My darling!' he said under his breath, when their hands met; and then that *drapeau rouge* had spread over her face.

He had to content himself with that hand-clasp; he could not very well take her in his arms in the tea-room, before all the people. The outraged British matrons present would have objected, and there might have been a scene.

If there was anything in the world that Edith's lover desired to avoid, it was a scene. He had, for a man, a ridiculous nervous shrink-

ing from notoriety, a horrible dread of ridicule; but he could not keep that love-light out of his eyes as he came towards her through the crowded room. He dropped her hand as soon as he could get his fingers to let it go; he would not have let people see him detaining it for the world.

'Well,' he said, when the greeting was over, 'have you had a busy day? Are you nearly ready?'

'I shall be ready in October,' Edith answered, with a tremulous quiver of her under lip, 'if—if you think it *must* be so soon, Derek.'

'There is nothing to wait for,' he said eagerly. 'If we put it off now, we shall have to wait for the spring. We shall be no richer in the spring.'

Edith sighed.

'I don't think we ought to marry at all, dear,' she said, with a weak attempt at a smile —'at any rate, not for years—not till——'

'Not till we have grown old and are gray-

headed!' he interrupted impatiently. 'Perhaps you will have changed your mind if we wait many years; you won't be satisfied with a captain of a line regiment who has nothing but his pay——'

'Hush!' she said, putting her hand softly on his arm, 'hush! I am not likely to change. I was thinking of you. You will lose so much, and you ought to do such great things. You will disappoint all your friends.'

He didn't exactly laugh aloud, but he laughed a low, pleasant, honest laugh.

'I don't care whom I disappoint, as long as I do not disappoint you,' he said tenderly.

His voice thrilled her, and her eyes grew suddenly moist, and her lips were trembling. There was nothing more said about putting it off. There was a look of beautiful, inexpressible affection in her eyes as she smiled at her lover through her tears across that little marble-topped tea-table—a look he had never seen on any woman's face before.

'Give her up! By Jove!' he told himself, 'I would not give her up for the whole world!'

He was not at all the sort of fellow that anyone who knew Edith best would have singled out as her choice. He was the last person in the world they would have expected her to choose.

But perhaps she hadn't chosen. Perhaps the choice had been on his side: the love, the devotion, the tenderness—call it what you will—that women go down before. Edith had gone down before the love she read in the blue eyes of this big, slow-witted giant. She hadn't had so much love in her life that she could afford to slight it, and she knew the real thing when she saw it.

She had not had many lovers in her time; she was not the girl to have lovers. She did not lay herself out to please people. For a woman of—well, never mind her age—who had arrived at years of discretion, she was singularly

free from the wiles and little fascinating ways that some girls practise from their cradles. Edith had nothing to attract lovers. Men do not care for grave faces, and a hard voice, and rare smiles ; they like a caressing voice, or a charming treble with a reedy thrill in it, and an April face radiant with smiles and blushes, and eyes that say a good deal, and that mean a great deal more. Edith had none of these fascinating things ; but when she was moved her beautiful dark eyes seemed to grow darker and brighter, and she had a tender, tremulous way with her mouth.

Whatever other men had seen in her, Derek Stanhope saw in her what he had never seen in any woman before. And Edith ? Well, Edith never knew how it happened. Perhaps it was the magic of the love that filled his heart that won her. A man may not be very clever or very capable ; there is no need whatever for him to be handsome—some women have a positive dislike to physical beauty in a man ; but

he must have something they want. They do not all want the same thing, thank Heaven!

Edith had somewhere deep down in her heart an aching want she had never really admitted to herself; she wanted the touch of a hand, the sound of a voice, different from the hand-clasps or the voices about her. She wanted the sympathy of just one person whose presence to her was different from the presence of every other human being in the world. She found what she wanted in the person of a heavy, slow-witted captain of a line regiment.

The big, awkward, gentle-natured soldier had nothing to recommend him but his love; he hadn't a penny in the world besides his commission. Edith might have been in her teens for the improvidence she displayed in marrying upon such a ridiculous prospect.

They went through the furniture galleries of the Army and Navy Stores together, picking out chairs and tables like a couple of children

furnishing a doll's-house. There was a delightful lounging chair that Edith had set her heart upon, that she had quite made up her mind to buy for Captain Stanhope's smoking-room—her first purchase in housekeeping. She made her lover 'try it on'—she called it 'trying on'—and see how it suited him.

'It's an awfully comfortable chair, Edie,' he said, when he got himself reluctantly out of it, 'but it's beyond our figure. We shall have to give up all thoughts of chairs of our own for the present, and go into rooms, furnished rooms, for a year or two.'

Then Edith unfolded her plans.

'I don't think we need do that, dear,' she said, hanging her head. 'It will be cheaper to take a flat, and—and furnish it. It will save a great deal in the end.'

'Furnish it!' he said ruefully. 'I don't see how we are to manage the furnishing, unless we give up our trip. If we stayed at home this winter we might——'

'We need not stay at home,' she said, interrupting him. 'I think we can manage the furniture very well.'

'The deuce you do! Have you come into a fortune, Edie?'

'I—I have seen my trustee,' she said, blushing.

There was a little catch in her voice, and the words did not come easily.

'And he has come down handsomely? Why, this is quite unexpected; you did not think he would do anything.'

'I did not know the terms of my father's will; he—he did not lead me to expect that—he—would—be—generous.'

Edith's voice was not quite steady; she could not keep it steady. There was a lump in her throat that was keeping the words back.

'And he has come down handsomely after all?'

'I don't know—about—about being hand-

some, but we shall be able to manage the furnishing.'

After this, Edith and her lover went through a great many departments where tables, and chairs, and sideboards, and couches are sold; and they inspected some carpets It would take a long time to decide upon carpets; carpets and curtains require such serious consideration, so many things have to be taken into account, that they cannot be dismissed hastily. Having settled upon certain articles, the lovers put off the curtains and carpets for another day.

'I shall have to come up to town so many times during the next few weeks,' Edith said; 'we shall have plenty of opportunities of choosing the other things.'

She did not say it very heartily; she couldn't put any of the rapture a bride should have in choosing the furniture for her future home into that hurried selection. There was something unreal about it, as if she were buying things in a dream; and all the time she was going up

and down those everlasting stairs at the Stores her heart was going pit-a-pat, as if she had never climbed a flight of stairs before in her life.

Of course it was the stairs!

CHAPTER VIII.

A TIRESOME VISITOR.

EDITH'S lover saw her into the train for St. Oswald's. He drove with her in a hansom from the Army and Navy Stores to the Great Eastern Station, and he waited with her on the platform until the train started.

She had only taken a single ticket up to town, and Captain Stanhope had to take her ticket for the return journey. As she waited in the booking-office while he got her ticket—he had to take his turn at the end of a line of people; there were a good many people going by the train—a gentleman in the crowd spoke to her.

'Can I take your ticket for St. Oswald's?' he asked her.

He rather startled her, though nothing could have been more civil than his offer and the way he made it.

'Thank you, someone has already taken it,' she said stiffly.

And she turned away.

'Who was that man who spoke to you?' her lover asked, as he put her in her carriage.

'I don't know—a stranger; he offered to take my ticket.'

When the train had steamed out of the station, Edith asked herself who the man could be who had spoken to her, and how he knew that she was going to St. Oswald's. She could not remember to have seen his face before; he was an entire stranger to her, and he knew her destination. It was most probably somebody belonging to St. Oswald's—a bank clerk, or a tradesman, or someone engaged in business in the town—who knew her, but whom she

would not be likely to remember. She could not be expected to know everyone in St. Oswald's.

She thought about the man all through the journey, when she ought to have been thinking of the events of the day. She had quite enough in such a full day to occupy her thoughts. There had been the interview with her trustee, and another interview of a more satisfactory character later on, at a place of business in the City; and then there had followed the shopping, the purchase of her wedding clothes, the meeting with her lover, the inspection of the chairs and tables and couches for 'the flat,' and the drive back in the dusk to the station.

With all this to think of, Edith's mind, whether she would or not, persisted in bringing up the image of the man in the booking-office, and his ridiculous question, 'Can I take your ticket for St. Oswald's?'

She reached home tired and dispirited. She

was more nervous and depressed than she cared to acknowledge, and when she once reached her own room she did not leave it again that night. Miss Gunning was just the same, she learned from the maid who brought in her tea, and she had been asking for her all the day. Somebody had called to see her while she had been away. It was a gentleman who had asked for her; he had called early in the day, and he had inquired by what train she was expected back. He had not given his name; he had not even said that he would call again. The maid was quite sure that it was no one belonging to St. Oswald's, no one asking for a subscription. It was a stranger; she was sure that she had never seen him before.

Edith went to bed early, but she could not rest. She tossed uneasily till daylight, and then she fell into a troubled sleep, and dreamed, not of her lover, and the trousseau she had been buying, but of the man who had accosted her at the railway station; his voice was ringing in

her ears when she awoke in the morning. He was asking her the same question—if he should take her ticket to St. Oswald's.

The servant by some oversight had not given Edith her letter overnight—the letter that had come from Mrs. Bellew during her absence. She found it on the breakfast-table when she went into her sitting-room the next morning. This explained the visit of the stranger yesterday: he had called about Dora Tremlett's missing necklace.

He called again during the morning, while Edith was looking over her tablets, and reckoning up the things she had bought the day before. They came to a great deal more than she had imagined, than she had reckoned upon—to more than double the amount. It is so easy to lose count when one is buying things; they add up in a most unaccountable way. She looked grave when the unpleasant total stared her in the face. She was still looking grave when she went downstairs to see the stranger

who had called ; she was thinking of the figures that had stared her in the face, and how the things had mounted up.

The servant who opened the door had shown ' the gentleman ' into the dining-room. It was not a room that was often used now, and it had a dreary, forlorn look about it in the morning light. The curtains were shrouded in holland wrappers, and the old leather-covered chairs were ranged against the wall, and there was a vast expanse of dark shining mahogany. It was a dreary place at the best of times. All the furniture was old-fashioned, and of that dark-hued mahogany which grows darker with age. There was a massive sideboard—a big ugly Georgian sideboard—at one end of the room, with two funereal-looking urns upon it, in dark-fluted mahogany, that might have held the ashes of the black-browed Gunnings who hung upon the walls.

The stranger was studying the portraits on the walls when Edith came in. He turned round

when the door opened, and bowed to her in an old-fashioned courtly way. He was a man of middle age, with a prematurely bald head, rather stooping in his gait, and he wore gold-rimmed spectacles—a commonplace sort of man with rather superior manners.

'I am sorry to disturb you so early,' he said, as he placed a chair for Edith; the chairs were all set against the wall, and he brought one over and set it for her beside the table in such a way that the light from the window fell upon her face.

He could not have helped remarking, if he were a physiognomist, that she was looking pale and harassed, that there were dark rims beneath her eyes. This he saw, because every line of her face was visible to him in that cold, searching light.

The stranger began the interview by apologizing for the errand that had brought him there.

'My name is Finch, ma'am,' he said, by way

of introducing himself. 'I did not send up a card, as the name was not known to you. I am here to make inquiries about the diamond necklace that was lost at Nunwell on the morning of Mrs. Tremlett's wedding——'

'How do you know it was lost in the morning?' Edith interrupted eagerly; she had her own idea about the loss. 'How can you tell at what time in the day it disappeared?'

The words had escaped her; she did not intend to show so much interest: the loss of the diamonds had nothing to do with her.

The detective noted her eagerness.

'We have no means of knowing at what time the diamonds were really stolen; we only know at what time the loss was discovered,' he said dryly. 'We want you to assist our investigation with any facts connected with the disappearance of the necklace that you can remember.'

'There is very little to tell,' Edith said rather

shortly; she did not like the tone the man had taken, and she did not like the way he stared at her, while he was speaking, behind his gold-rimmed glasses. 'I can tell you all I know about it in a very few words.'

And then she gave him a short circumstantial account of the discovery of the loss of the necklace. She told him all she could remember.

'You took the jewelry up to the safe on the eve of the wedding; do you remember locking the safe after you? Sometimes these safes are difficult to shut.'

'Of course I shut it; I stayed behind to lock it. But I am not sure about carrying the necklace upstairs; I carried some of the wedding presents, and Miss Bellew—she was Miss Bellew then—carried the others. I cannot be sure which of us carried the case with the diamonds. I rather think Miss Bellew carried it.'

'Exactly; that point has to be ascertained.'

Mr. Finch made a note in his pocket-book, and then he asked Edith some more questions.

'You are sure the necklace was in the case when you carried it upstairs?'

'Of course it was in the case; Miss Bellew put it back in the case herself. She had been trying it on to show her friends, and when she took it off she put it back in the case.'

What an idiot the man must be to think that anyone would drop a diamond necklace about the room!

'Did Miss Bellew fasten the case when she put the necklace back?'

'I suppose so. It was a rather difficult spring to open; I don't know what it may have been to close. I do not remember trying to close it.'

'You opened it, then?'

'Yes, of course I opened it!'

'When did you first open it?'

'I—I am sure I don't remember; on the

evening of the wedding, most likely. But what can that have to do with the loss of the necklace?'

Edith was getting impatient; she could not think what the man meant by asking these idiotic questions.

'We will come to that presently,' he said in his dry way. 'I am sorry to detain you, but I am not asking a single question that is unnecessary. Am I to understand that on the only occasion on which you opened the case you did not close it again?'

'I have no recollection of closing it.'

'You assisted Mrs. Tremlett—Miss Bellew that was—in carrying her presents upstairs on the eve of the wedding, and the case containing the necklace was among them?'

'The case containing the necklace was most certainly among them,' Edith said rather tartly.

She could not think what the man was driving at.

'And you locked them up in the safe?'

'I locked them up in the safe.'

'Who assisted you to lock the safe?'

'No one assisted me; I locked it without assistance. Miss Bellew had gone to her mother's room; she had gone to wish her good-night, and I stayed behind to lock the safe.'

'You stayed behind? Did you stay behind alone, or was anyone with you holding a light?'

'There was no need of a light; there was sufficient light from Mrs. Bellew's dressing-room.'

'Then you were alone when you locked the safe?'

'I was alone when I locked the safe.'

'And about the keys: what did you do with the keys when you had locked it?'

'I took back the keys at once to Mrs. Bellew's room. She was wishing Dora—Miss Bellew—good-night, and she was rather overcome, and

I did not go in. I gave them to her maid at the door.'

'You did not see the maid take them into her mistress's room?'

'No; she was waiting at the door, with the handle in her hand, until Miss Bellew came out. She must have taken the keys in directly, or Mrs. Bellew would have asked for them. They were under her pillow in the morning.'

'And you do not remember having seen the necklace again after you had locked it in the safe overnight?'

'I do not remember having seen it after. It was such a busy morning that I cannot be quite sure. There was so much confusion that it is impossible to remember distinctly what happened.'

'Miss Bellew unlocked the safe in the morning, if I understand aright, and brought the jewelry, that had been taken up overnight, down into the room where the wedding presents

were arranged. Did you give her any assistance ?'

'I may have carried some of the things downstairs—I do not remember. Everything was done in such a hurry; we were going up and down the stairs all the morning. The things were not brought down until quite late, just before the bride was dressed for the wedding. They had been forgotten until then, there was so much else to think of, and she arranged them herself.'

'Did you see her arrange them ?'

'I was going in and out of the room while she was arranging them; they were in a room off the drawing-room—Mrs. Bellew's boudoir. There were two doors to the room; one opened into the back drawing-room, and one on to the landing: both the doors were open on the morning of the wedding.'

'Did you particularly notice how she arranged them ?'

'Dear me, no! I had other things to do. I

only remember noticing, quite casually, that she had not opened the case containing the necklace.'

'Did it occur to you to ask why it was not opened like the rest?'

'I didn't think at all about it. I merely noticed that it was not opened.'

Edith did not say the reason that had occurred to her on that ill-fated morning for the morocco case being closed. It was not likely she would tell this stranger of the unfortunate little joke she had made about Buddha.

'The door of the room was locked, I suppose, while the wedding party were at church?'

'I know nothing about the door of the room being locked; it might have been wide open, for all I know. It was not my concern; I was one of the bridesmaids.'

Edith was getting tired of the man's questions. If he wanted to ask about the rooms, and the locking of the doors, he ought to go to Nunwell; it was ridiculous, his coming here.

'I will not detain you much longer,' he said, noticing her impatience.

She did not attempt to conceal her impatience; she had so many things to do, and this tiresome person was wasting all the morning.

'Whom can you remember having last seen in the room where the presents were displayed before the diamonds were missed? Think before you answer; this is rather an important question.'

'The last person?' she repeated. 'Captain Tremlett was the last person who was in the room. He was there and on the landing all the time Mrs. Tremlett was changing her wedding dress. I quite well remember seeing him there, walking up and down the room.'

'Why was he walking up and down the room?'

'He was impatient, I suppose. He wanted to be off; he kept saying that they would be late for the train. He was walking about all

the time the bride was putting on her travelling things.'

'And the wedding presents were on view at this time?'

'They were not really on view; the guests were all downstairs at the breakfast, but Captain Tremlett had come away from the table before the rest. The presents were not on view until the bride and bridegroom had driven away.'

'Who was with him while he was walking up and down the room?'

'I'm sure I don't know. He was alone when I saw him, standing at the door. I came downstairs to tell him Mrs. Tremlett was just ready. He kept on sending messages up to the room where she was dressing, and I had to go downstairs to satisfy him.'

'And after he left the room, when the wedding party had driven away, you found out the diamonds were missing?'

'When the guests came upstairs to look

at the presents, I found the case was empty.'

Edith got up from her seat; she was in no humour to answer any more questions, and Mr. Finch did not seek to detain her.

'I am much obliged to you, madam, for the information you have given me,' he said in his courteous way when he took his leave; but there was nothing in his words or manner to indicate whether he had learned anything of value or not.

CHAPTER IX.

A PRIVATE DETECTIVE.

Mrs. Bellew had not had one quiet hour since the discovery of the loss of Dora's diamonds. Captain Tremlett had put the matter into the hands of an experienced detective at Scotland Yard, and his emissaries had been coming and going to and from Nunwell ever since. There was not a day that Mrs. Bellew was not disturbed by someone prowling about the house asking questions.

Every inmate of Nunwell had been separately examined, and all the servants' boxes had been searched.

No good had come of all this questioning;

the missing diamonds were as far off being found as ever.

But this was not the worst of it. The loss of the diamond necklace would have been nothing compared to the complications it involved—the quite cruel and inexplicable complications.

A misunderstanding had arisen between Dora and her husband. It had arisen on account of the loss of the necklace, or, at least, it dated from the time when the loss was discovered.

Captain Tremlett had been moved to anger on the day of his wedding at the slight—he called it the slight – that the poor unconscious little bride had shown him in not wearing his wedding gift.

He had chosen to take umbrage at it; he had been sulky all through the ceremony, and he had behaved like a bear at the breakfast.

He was behaving very badly now, according

to all accounts; he was treating that poor, meek-spirited little 'Mousey' abominably.

She had not complained to her mother—she would not have complained for the world; but Parker, her mother's maid, who had accompanied her on her honeymoon, had written to Mrs. Bellew about certain things. Parker had been Mrs. Bellew's confidential maid for years, and she had given her up to Dora at her marriage.

Parker had not liked the way her young mistress was treated, and she had written home to her mother, and told her certain things. If what Parker told her was true, the man was behaving like a brute—there was no name that was bad enough for him.

Mrs. Bellew's position was rather difficult, not to say delicate. It is an ungracious thing for a mother-in-law to interfere between a man and his wife—ungracious and unthankful. She had no excuse for interfering. Dora had not complained. Her letters had not been so effu-

sive as the letters of some brides of a week: she had not dwelt very much on the happiness —the supreme bliss—of her present lot; but she had not uttered one word of complaint.

What Parker had written to her former mistress she had written in confidence—in the strictest confidence. If Mrs. Bellew betrayed any knowledge of certain facts that she had disclosed to her, Parker would very justly be regarded as a spy, and no doubt she would be summarily dismissed. What man in his senses would keep a woman in his service who was always writing detailed reports of his doings to his mother-in-law?

Whatever had happened in the sacred privacy of that honeymoon tour, she had no right to know anything about it. Above all things, she had no right to interfere. Dora's mother told herself this a dozen times a day, and yet, if Parker's account were true, she did not know how to remain passive.

The anxiety and worry preyed upon her

spirits; her nearest friends could not understand her unusual depression. Everyone agreed that she was worrying herself to death about the necklace that had been stolen from her house.

Sir Bourchier had been much disturbed by the loss of the diamonds. They were family jewels; they had belonged to his great-grandmother, who had worn them in a head dress at the wedding of his most gracious Majesty King George III. to Queen Charlotte. There was a picture of her, with the dress she wore on the occasion, and the jewels in her hair, hanging in the long gallery at Castle Hill.

Sir Bourchier was not satisfied with his son's action. He had written, or he had caused his daughter Ermyntrude, who acted as his amanuensis, to write, to a private detective in London, who had once been employed about a plate robbery at Castle Hill, and who had succeeded in tracing the delinquents and recovering the stolen property. Sir Bourchier had

instructed this man to investigate the mystery connected with the lost diamonds; they were family property, and he had a perfect right to take independent action in the matter. The man he instructed worked entirely on his own individual responsibility; he had no connection whatever with Scotland Yard.

This person also came down to Nunwell, and made inquiries about the necklace. He did not hover about the place for days, as Captain Tremlett's agents had done; he drove up to the house in the morning, and he drove back to the station in the afternoon. He made a few inquiries, and he inspected the position of the safe, and the approaches to the room where the necklace had been on view, or was supposed to have been on view; and he had an interview with the housekeeper, who had the key of the room in her pocket while the wedding party were away at church. He did not ask to see the servants' boxes; he did not give any trouble to anybody; he asked the

questions he had come to ask, and when he had partaken of some lunch he drove away.

While he was eating his luncheon in the dining-room—the room where the wedding breakfast had been spread—he learnt some particulars about the wedding. He kept the man-servant who waited upon him in conversation about the events of the day while he was eating his luncheon.

'It was a wet day, then?' he said casually.

'It was pouring cats and dogs all the time the party were away at church.'

'That was unfortunate; but it did not matter, as they were in close carriages.'

'Close carriages are as bad as open ones when people don't shut the windows. Miss Dora—Mrs. Tremlett—was wet through when she came back from church. I saw it myself. I was standing on the steps when the carriage drove up, and I opened the door for her to alight.'

'Wet through! The bride wet through?'

the detective said, pausing with his knife and fork in his hand. 'I never heard such a thing. There must be some mistake.'

'I opened the door of the carriage myself; there couldn't be no mistake,' the footman said, in an injured tone. 'The front of her satin dress was wet, and her veil, the side the rain had drifted in, was that wet that you could have wrung it.'

'Why did she keep the window of the carriage open in the rain?' the detective asked.

'It wasn't her; it was the Captain. They had had a tiff on the way, an' he was sulky an' wouldn't put up the window of the carriage.'

The detective smiled. He was a young man, and he couldn't help smiling at the ridiculous picture the man had drawn of the sulky bridegroom keeping the carriage window open, and the bride getting wet through.

'What was the tiff about?' he asked.

'About the necklace he had give her for

a wedding present—the one that was stolen. He thought she ought to have wore it at the wedding, an' she didn't; so he had a fit of the sulks, an' wouldn't speak a civil word to her for the rest of the day.'

'He was angry because she didn't wear the necklace, then? Pity she hadn't worn it. If it had been on her neck, it wouldn't have been stolen.'

'I never see a man so angry about a little matter, an' show off so before the company. There was Sir Bourchier a-sitting there, just where you are sitting, an' the young ladies, an' all the great people hereabouts; an' the Captain he gets up from the table, before the healths have been drunk an' the breakfast is half over, an' declares it is time to go away.'

'How about the bride? Couldn't she keep him in order?'

'Oh, poor little Miss Dora hadn't the spirit of a mouse. They used to call her "Mousey,"

because she was so timid an' had no spirit. She got up from the table directly he told her, an' hurried away to take her gown off and put on her travelling things. He didn't give her no rest all the time she was changing her things. He went up to the drawing-room and walked up and down muttering to hisself, an' coming to the foot of the stairs every now an' then to call up an' ask if she were ready. Mrs. Roberts, the housekeeper, came up while he was there with the key of the room where the presents were laid out, an' she unlocked the door, thinking that might keep him quiet. He was standing just inside the room, with his hands in his pockets, a-calling up to her, when I came upstairs to tell him the carriage had come round.'

'Was anyone with the—er—Captain when you saw him standing just inside the room, calling to the—er—bride to come down?'

'Not that I can remember. He was there alone. Everyone was upstairs helping the

bride, an' the guests hadn't come up from the breakfast.'

The detective was so moved by the picture of this modern Bluebeard standing at the foot of the stairs, shouting to the bride to come down, that he gave a low whistle.

He jumped up from the table a moment after, and declared that he was ready to start.

While the dogcart that he had driven over from Hereford was being brought round, he went upstairs to have another look at the room where the wedding presents had been laid out.

It did not seem worth while to go up and look at the empty room where the jewels had once been. If the walls could have given back reflections of all that had happened within them, it would have been different. With the phonograph mysteriously giving back the sound of our voices, who shall say that the walls about us may not give back the shadows which we cast upon them, that their silent witness

may not some day reveal the hidden secrets of our lives ?

The room, which was known as the boudoir, adjoined the drawing-room, and the door was very near the foot of the stairs that led to the upper story. Anyone standing within the door could be heard distinctly on the floor above. There was nothing to be learnt from the position of the room—nothing to give a clue to the recovery of the lost necklace.

While the detective was standing at the top of the stairs, measuring with his eye the distance from the landing to the room above, where the bride had been dressing, while her husband was shouting to her from below, a young woman came out of the back drawing-room.

It was Mrs. Bellew's new maid—a smartly-dressed young woman, with a fresh colour and a fringe, and wearing a jaunty cap. She stepped back when she saw a man standing at the top of the stairs, and the colour dropped suddenly

out of her face. She was not a bad-looking young woman, but there was an anxious, worried look about her face that her fringe could not hide, and the lines about her mouth were hard.

'Oh, it is all right,' the detective said, with a smile; 'I am only making a few observations.' And then a thought seemed to strike him. 'You are Mrs. Bellew's maid?' he said.

'Yes; but I have only been in her service a few weeks. Her old maid left her to go with Mrs. Tremlett, when she was married.'

The woman had a nervous, constrained manner, and she spoke rather hurriedly.

'You were here at the time of the wedding?'

'Yes, I was here at the wedding.'

'You remember seeing the necklace that was lost?'

'No, I have never seen the necklace; I have never set eyes upon it!'

She answered sharply, almost rudely, and

turned her back on the detective, as if to go upstairs.

'One moment, Mary,' he said good-humouredly. 'Your name is Mary, isn't it? Just tell me what you know about the loss of the necklace.'

'My name isn't Mary, and I don't know anything about the necklace. I never set eyes on the necklace.'

'So you have said before; but you haven't told me your name—your right name, if it isn't Mary.'

'Venner—at least, Simmons,' the woman said, correcting herself.

'Christian and surname?' he asked.

He made the inquiry in an offhand way; there was nothing in his manner to agitate her.

'No, surname,' she said shortly; 'my Christian name is Patience.'

'Patience Venner or Patience Simmons?' he asked.

He put the question rather suddenly, as if he

had tripped her up, and he looked her steadily in the face for a moment while he waited for her reply.

The woman blushed and stammered.

'Patience—Simmons,' she said sullenly.

And again she turned to go up the stairs.

'I am sorry to detain you, Patience—to trespass on the virtue that your name implies—but I want you to answer one or two questions. Did you assist in dressing Mrs. Tremlett on the day of the wedding—in getting her ready for her journey?'

'I was in the room helping, with the other ladies. I strapped her boxes while they were putting on her things.'

'Did you pack her boxes?'

'I helped pack them, and I strapped them when they were packed.'

'What happened while you were packing them?'

'Nothing that I can remember, except that Captain Tremlett was calling to her at the foot

of the stairs to come down, and everybody was nervous and upset.'

'Did you leave the room while Mrs. Tremlett was being dressed?'

'I did not leave the room until she had gone downstairs, and then I looked over the banisters and watched them go away.'

'Were there any of the other servants looking over the banisters, watching them go away?' he asked.

'Not that I know of; they were at the upper windows. I don't remember anyone else being there.'

'You were there alone, I understand, and the door of the room behind you, where the wedding presents were laid out, was open at the time?'

'I am sure I don't know whether it was open or shut; I did not take notice. It might have been open, for all I know.'

This was all the information the clever detective that Sir Bourchier had sent down could get out of Miss Simmons. She was not exactly

reticent, and he could not say that she had kept anything back; but she was not quite so eager to volunteer information as the footman had been, and he didn't like the way her colour —she had rather a high colour—went and came.

He thought about Patience and her meagre information, and the unwilling, not to say defiant, way in which she gave it, all the way back to Hereford.

'Do you happen to know anyone of the name of Venner about here?' he asked the groom who had come over with him in the dog-cart, as they were driving back.

'There are no Venners about here that I know of,' the man answered. 'It's not a Hereford name.'

When they reached the inn the groom was still turning the name over in his mind.

'Do you know any Venners about here?' he asked the men in the yard, as he was taking out his horse. 'The gent I took over to Nunwell was asking about 'em.'

'There's a chap called Venner on a job at Fryston—a painter fellow come down with Grace's men,' one of the men who was rubbing down a horse stopped to remark.

The detective ascertained before he left Hereford that Fryston was the name of the place that was getting ready for Captain Tremlett and his bride. It was an estate belonging to the Tremletts, and the house, which was a good deal out of repair, was being done up. There had been workmen down from London doing it up for months past. The restoration had been put in the hands of a great London firm, and an army of workmen had been sent down. Fryston was within a couple of miles of Nunwell; the dogcart had passed it on the way back to Hereford.

The detective almost regretted, as he went back to town by the night mail, that he had not stopped on the way and had an interview with Mr. Venner.

CHAPTER X.

AN OLD WORCESTER BOWL.

An unexpected event occurred that brought the bridegroom back to Nunwell before the honeymoon was over. It was not an auspicious event to recall him before the appointed time: it was the death of a second cousin. The Rector of Compton Florey had died suddenly, and his kinsfolk had been summoned to the funeral.

Compton Florey was a family living in the gift of Sir Bourchier, and the deceased Rector was his cousin, and Captain Tremlett was recalled from the scene of his wedded bliss to represent the head of the family on the mournful occasion.

Mrs. Bellew had hoped that Dora would accompany her husband, but the Captain returned alone. Fryston being in the hands of the workpeople, he stayed at Nunwell during his short visit to the neighbourhood.

Dora was quite well, he said, in reply to her mother's anxious inquiries—'quite well,' as far as he knew, 'and in a deuce of a hurry to get back.'

He did not give any reason for her being in 'a deuce of a hurry.' Something in her son-in-law's face, or his manner, told Mrs. Bellew that everything was not quite right. Without those letters from Parker, she would have known that things had gone crooked.

She would have given the world to know what was amiss, to have had her child back in her arms for half an hour. She would have found out, she told herself, in five minutes what had gone wrong, if she had had Dora alone for that five minutes.

She couldn't get a word about Dora from the

black-browed man who sat silent at table, or stood on the rug before the drawing-room grate, with his back to the fire, chewing the ends of his moustache. There was only one subject he would talk freely upon—the loss of the family diamonds. The subject seemed to have taken such hold upon him that it almost amounted to a mania.

Mrs. Bellew received a letter from Parker two mornings after her son-in-law's arrival.

'Miss Dora,' the woman wrote—she often made a slip in writing, and called her mistress by her old name—'is much better already for the Captain's absence. She was almost cheerful this morning. Keep him away from her as long as you can; make any excuse to detain him. I quite dread his coming back.'

This before the honeymoon was over!

Mrs. Bellew made an excuse to detain him the day after the funeral at Compton Florey. She expressed a desire to go over to Fryston and see how the work was progressing.

Her son-in-law drove her over after lunch: he was in no hurry to get back to his deserted bride.

The men who had been sent down from London had been working day and night to get the place ready in time, but it was not ready yet. It did not look as if it could be ready for weeks. The rooms were all smelling of new paint, and the walls had yet to be decorated. Everything had been settled before the wedding, and Dora had chosen the colouring for the rooms; she had been very particular about the colour—it had been chosen to match the furniture.

Now all this was to be altered. Captain Tremlett walked through the house and found fault with everything. He was quite sure that his orders had not been carried out, and he went away in a rage, and telegraphed to town for the head of the firm to come down to Fryston to meet him.

Mr. Grace came down the next day. All

the world was running after Mr. Grace at this particular time; he was the acknowledged Apostle of the Art of Decoration. He came down in response to Captain Tremlett's urgent telegram. He came down by one express train, and he returned to town by the next. He stayed exactly sixty-five minutes at Fryston. In the sixty-five minutes he walked through all the rooms and listened to Captain Tremlett's complaints, and he promised that everything should be altered—quite altered; that another scheme of colour should be substituted; and, having promised this, he went back to town. It didn't matter to him whether Fryston was a poem in saffron or a poem in blue; he would get his money in either case; it was not contract work. The difference in colour — the substituting orange for blue—would mean that Fryston would not be ready for occupation for a month later than the appointed time.

A man came over from Fryston the next day with a book of patterns that had been sent

from town for the Captain to choose from. The man who brought the patterns waited in the servants'-hall while he made his selection. People who came on business to the house were always hospitably entertained at Nunwell. There were cakes and ale for all callers, or, if more substantial refreshment were desired, there was bread and cheese, and a cut off a round of beef.

The man who had come over with the book of patterns was regaling himself on a plate of beef and a jug of home-brewed beer in the servants'-hall, when Mrs. Bellew's maid happened to pass through. She had a bowl of flowers in her hand—a bowlful of late roses—which she had brought down from the drawing-room to change the water. A footman and one of the maid-servants were in the hall talking to Mr. Grace's workman when Patience came in. She did not see him sitting at the table until she was half-way across the hall, and then, without any warning, the bowl she was

carrying slipped from her hands upon the stone floor and was shivered into a thousand atoms.

It was an old Worcester china bowl that Mrs. Bellew set great store by. It was one of the treasures of Nunwell, and it was smashed to atoms. It had been carefully preserved for over a hundred years, descending from father to son through half a dozen generations; it had been locked up in a cabinet at Nunwell as long as anyone could remember, and had only been taken out on the occasion of Dora's wedding; only reverent hands had ever been allowed to touch it; and now, in a moment, it was smashed to atoms by a careless maid-servant.

It was all the work of a moment; Patience was on her knees on the floor picking up the pieces, and the footman was helping her.

'I shouldn't like to be in your place,' a housemaid who was looking on unfeelingly remarked. 'I wouldn't be in your place for anything!'

There was no need to add to the poor girl's distress; her fresh-coloured face was as white

as a sheet, and all the colour had left her lips; her nerveless hands could scarcely hold the sherds she strove to gather up; and as the man who was eating his lunch at the table rose up, and came slowly over to her assistance, she looked up and saw him coming over, and fell forward with a little moan upon the floor.

The two men between them carried her to the open window, and the housemaid sprinkled some water upon her face. When she came to herself, she opened her eyes and looked fearfully round — 'for all the world,' as the maid remarked, 'as if she expected to see a ghost.' The messenger from Fryston had gone; he had not waited to finish his lunch.

'Who is it? where is he?' she asked wildly, putting the girl aside. She was not quite herself; she did not remember what had happened.

'Well, he's on the floor, I guess,' said the girl, with a feeble attempt at a joke, 'and he's broke in bits. A pretty kettle of fish you've made of it!'

Then Patience remembered the Worcester bowl. She wasn't good for much for the remainder of the day; she was nervous and hysterical, and she broke down in a fit of weeping in the middle of dressing her mistress for dinner, and had to leave off and go to bed.

'The poor girl's nerves are quite unstrung,' she told her son-in-law at dinner, speaking of the accident. She had not been very angry—it was no use being angry when the mischief was done—and the girl's distress had touched her.

'No wonder,' he said grimly, 'when she's broken a bowl worth fifty guineas!'

He did not strive to make himself agreeable to his mother-in-law, and she was not sorry, except for Dora's sake, when he went away.

'What an infernally unlucky house this is!' he had remarked in her hearing when the accident to the china bowl was being discussed; 'nothing seems safe in it.'

This remark, of course, applied to the neck-

lace, the loss of which had given everybody so much trouble.

Mrs. Bellew could but sigh an unwilling assent. It had been a particularly unlucky house since he had come into it.

She could not think why she had ever given her consent to the marriage, or what she could ever have seen in that big, black-browed bully, to trust her daughter to his keeping. It was late in the day to ask the question. She had been blinded, dazzled by Dora's good fortune—she had called it good fortune—it had been such a great thing to be the head of the family! Sir Bourchier could not last for ever; he was already breaking up, and when he was gone she would be Lady Tremlett, with a rent-roll of twelve thousand a year, and the finest place in the county.

What could a mother desire more? Mrs. Bellew had not desired more than this for her daughter. She had desired it so much that she had not desired anything else; she had

not let any other consideration weigh in the balance. Other mothers would have done the same—she was no worse than the rest; only now she would have given—she would have given years of her life to undo the mischief she had done.

CHAPTER XI.

DORA'S HONEYMOON.

Captain Tremlett did not return to his bride until several days after he had bidden adieu to her mother. He did not, when he left Nunwell, fly back to her on the wings of love—or, rather, by the express train, that would have brought him to her side the same evening. He delayed his happiness, and spent a week in town. There were 'things' that called him to town, he wrote to her; but he did not explain what the 'things' were.

Dora was quite satisfied that he should delay his coming; she would not have hastened his return for the world.

When he came back at last, and she heard the grating of the wheels of his carriage on the gravel outside the house, the colour dropped out of her face, and she trembled all over. She would have run away from him if she could—she would have given anything to run away—but it would be only making things worse, and she kept her ground—at least, she sank down upon a couch, and sat there trembling till her lord and master came in.

She had got to go through with it, she reminded herself; whatever happened, he was her husband. She had no redress. It would only make a scandal if she ran away. He came in presently; she heard his slow, heavy step on the stairs outside, and she rose up from her couch to meet him.

'So you have come back at last, Lionel?' she said, with a weak attempt at a smile of welcome, putting up her white cheek for him to kiss.

He did not kiss her for a minute; he held

her in his strong arms and looked down at her.

'You are very glad to see me, I suppose?' he said, with a laugh—a coarse laugh that made her tremble in his arms.

'Yes; oh yes!' she said hurriedly, but she could not put any warmth into it.

And then he bent down and kissed her cold lips, and held her in a vice for a few minutes.

She felt she must scream if he did not release her—that she must scream or die, that he was pressing all the life out of her; but she endured it without a moan. It was one of the things she had to endure—one of his pleasantries.

If she had been a coward she would have screamed, she would have told him that he was killing her.

'It looks like it!' he said, with his dark face bending over her.

She did not return his embrace; she could not if she would. She only shrank from him and shivered in his arms.

'Bah!' he said, putting her from him with a gesture of disgust. 'I thought you were flesh and blood, and you are only an icicle. What an infernal fool I was to marry you!'

He had flung her back upon the couch, where Parker found her weeping an hour later, and took her up to bed.

'I knew exactly what it would be, Miss Dora,' she said, when she had got her poor young mistress up in her own room and had locked the door upon her. 'I knew it would be as bad as ever. If you'd only let me write to your mamma——'

'I wouldn't have you write to mamma for the world!' Dora sobbed, with her face on the bosom of her faithful serving-woman; 'I would bear anything rather than mamma should know!'

'Have you heard anything about the necklace, Lionel?' she asked him the next morning at breakfast.

She did not really care whether he had

heard anything about it or not—she hated the necklace, she never wanted to see it again —but she was obliged to say something. She could not sit opposite to him all through that dreary meal without speaking, and there was nothing else she could talk about.

He hated any reference to her old home; when she spoke about Nunwell, he was always reproaching her for wanting to go back, for being unhappy, dissatisfied.

'If the police have got hold of the right clue, you know more about it than they do.'

'I?' she repeated—'I? What can I know about it, Lionel?'

'That is more than I can say,' he answered grimly. 'It was seen last in your possession; no one else seems to have had the handling of it. You know best what reason you had for hiding it.'

'Reason for hiding it!' she repeated, looking at him across the table with eyes widening with astonishment. 'What do you mean, Lionel?'

'I only mean what I say,' he said, getting up from the table with a heavy cloud on his dark face, and a look in his eyes that she could not understand, that made her tremble. 'Perhaps you wanted it for a bribe: there have been such things. Hang it! you can never trust a woman; the fairer she seems, the falser she is at heart!'

She could not understand at all what he meant; she could only sit there trembling, with her face scarlet and the tears smarting in her eyes. It was one of his ridiculous unfounded charges—one of the mean, cowardly barbs that he was always aiming at her little tender heart.

'A bribe! whom could I want to bribe?'

She was not wise enough to let him alone, not to be disturbed by his cruel taunting words; she was weak enough to reason with him. She was well named 'Mousey'; she had only the spirit of a mouse.

'You know best. An old lover, most likely,

someone whose silence you had to pay for—and you paid for it at my expense.'

'A lover! Lionel! how can you say such things?'

She had risen from the breakfast-table; her face and neck were scarlet, and her bosom was heaving. It was a gratuitous insult; she had never had anything but kind things said to her in all her life; she had never been credited with anything but pure motives and gentle actions, and now for this monstrous charge to be made against her! It took away her breath; it came upon her like a blow.

'Yes,' he said with a harsh laugh, 'a lover; is there anything so wonderful in a woman having a lover? Bah! you don't deceive me with your air of injured innocence!'

He flung himself out of the room, and left her standing there flushed and indignant. She could have borne anything but this.

How could she tell if he were in earnest, or if it were only a cruel jest—a wicked,

wanton jest—to make her unhappy? She knew so little of the man into whose keeping she had committed her happiness; she never knew whether he were in jest or in earnest. Perhaps the knowledge would not have availed her; his jest was often more cruel than his earnest.

She had suddenly awoke to the miserable knowledge that there had been some mistake in her life. Someone had made a mistake. Fate, Providence, Chance, Circumstance—there were several nails to hang the fault upon—had made a cruel blunder. It was a rude awakening.

She found out the mistake very soon after she was married; she found it out at once; she had not to wait a single day. There were hundreds of men in the world—her world—that she could have married, good men and true, and she had chosen one that was neither good nor true. At least, he had been chosen for her, and she had accepted him. She had accepted him without asking any questions—

accepted him thankfully, gratefully, almost overwhelmed by the honour he had done her—telling herself, as everybody had told her, that she was the luckiest girl in the world!

Nobody had asked any questions. Captain Tremlett might have been the Sultan of Turkey, for the submissive readiness with which Dora Bellew had picked up the handkerchief he had thrown down. He had but to throw the handkerchief, and she was ready to flutter to his side, ready to give her life, her pure little soul, into his keeping. It was not her place, perhaps, to ask questions: he was the head of the family; at no distant time he would be Sir Lionel. This was enough, surely enough, for any girl; it was enough for Dora.

Mrs. Bellew had been willing enough for this consideration to give up her daughter, her innocent lamb, that she had shielded so carefully all her life from the knowledge of evil, whose innocent eyes had never looked on an unclean thing,

whose ears had never been defiled by an impure word.

It was a rude awakening. Dora Tremlett did not awake all at once ; she could not realize at first what had happened to her. Dazed, bewildered, all but crushed, in the early days of that miserable honeymoon, she could only ask herself, day after day, if it were true, or if it were some dreadful hideous nightmare that she should awake from presently.

It was impossible to hide her misery from the watchful eyes of Parker, but she would not have had her mother know of it for the world. Whatever happened, she told herself, her mother must never, never know of it.

There would not have been much to tell her ; only the old story : a nature, not too noble to begin with, coarsened by self-indulgence, inflamed to the verge of madness by drink.

Dora's husband was not exactly a drunkard ; but he drank deeper than most men, and when he drank he was subject to delusions. The de-

lusions did not always pass off with the fumes of the alcohol he had been drinking ; sometimes in his sober moments they assumed the most alarming proportions.

Captain Tremlett did not drink as vulgar men drink. He did not make a beast of himself, and roll about the room, and require to be carried to bed by the servants. He generally began drinking early in the day, after breakfast, and he would sit drinking till noon, and at noon he would mount his horse, a big iron-gray cob that was as strong as an elephant, and he would ride across the country, as the grooms expressed it when they talked of their master's doings, 'as if the devil himself were at his heels.'

In these dreary October days—it was already October—he would not return until dusk, often not until long after dusk, and when he returned the fumes of his morning potations would have passed off. He was seldom absent at dinner, a meal that poor Dora dreaded ; she was never

quite sure what mood her lord and master might be in. Sometimes he would eat his dinner in sullen silence; at other times he would find fault with everything, and get up from the table, before the meal was half over, in a rage. It was his pleasure that, at whatever hour he left the dining-room—and he often sat over his wine until midnight—Dora should await him in the drawing-room upstairs, and if he were so minded, he would keep her listening to his ravings till daylight.

He had behaved better at Nunwell; if he had sat late over his wine, he had had the grace not to inflict his society upon his mother-in-law. He never, while he was there alone, went up to the drawing-room after dinner. When his potations were ended he retired to smoke in the billiard-room, and Mrs. Bellew saw no more of him till the next morning. Perhaps the footman could have told a tale; but he knew his place, and kept silence.

Captain Tremlett did not come back until

dusk on that first afternoon after his return from Nunwell. He had gone out after luncheon, and he had not come back till dinner-time. His horse's coat was flecked with foam, and its sides were heaving, as it was being led back to the stables; it had evidently been galloped hard; its owner, having nothing else to take his ill humour out upon, had taken it out of his beast. His brow was as black as night when he sat down to dinner, and the meal passed in sullen silence. Dora made a pretence of eating, but every mouthful seemed to choke her; she was glad to rise up from the table and get away.

She could not escape the storm for long. Her husband followed her into the drawing-room almost immediately. She had not noticed that he had scarcely eaten anything—that he had been drinking heavily all through the dinner.

She was reading when he came into the room—at least, she was trying to read—and she

looked up with a terror she could not keep out of her eyes when he entered. She could not think what had brought him up so soon. He strode across the room in his slow, heavy way, and took up his accustomed place on the hearthrug, with his back to the fire. It was not a very large fire, and the night was chilly, and he quite covered it up as he stood there. Dora could not see a spark. He stood with his black brows contracted, glaring down upon her under his eyelids, with a gleam of something like triumph in his bloodshot eyes. She trembled and flushed beneath his scrutiny; she felt herself growing guiltily pink, and her breath coming short and quick.

'What is it, Lionel?' she said timidly; she was obliged to say something to break the dreadful silence.

'You may well ask what!' he said, his face growing red with sullen wrath. 'I've found you out, my meek little mouse; your game's discovered.'

'My game!' she repeated feebly; she could not think what he meant.

'Your little game, that you thought so clever; it's all unravelled; the detectives have been too much for you.'

'The detectives!' she said; 'I do not understand. What have the detectives to do with me?'

He laughed a harsh, brutal laugh that made her shiver.

'You'll find out soon enough, you little innocence; you won't be able to take them in as you've taken me in. They've found out the whole story, and a pretty story it is!'

'What story, Lionel? What have I done that—that the detectives have found out?'

Her face was red with indignation, and there was a tremor in her voice that would have touched any other man. She had never stood up for herself in her life; she had always had people to stand up for her, to take her part, if it were necessary—but it had never been

necessary. She had been so gently nurtured all her life, so loved, and petted, and admired, that, now that this dreadful thing had befallen her, she did not know how to defend herself.

He burst into a mocking, triumphant laugh.

'You may well ask what you have done, now that the mystery of the missing necklace is unravelled! All the world will soon know what you have done; it'll be on everybody's tongue. Sir Bourchier's fellow was sharper than the police, after all; he's found out all about those midnight meetings. I shouldn't have thought your taste lay in that way.'

'I don't know what you mean, Lionel,' she said, with some show of spirit, and raising her meek eyes to his with a look that he had not seen in them before. 'Why do you speak in riddles?'

'By Jove!' he said, looking down at her fiercely, with a red light in his eyes that she quailed beneath, 'it's no riddle, and that you'll

find out. Your secret's discovered, madam, and your fine lover is in gaol.'

She rose up from her seat and stood before him white and trembling, with a certain pitiful dignity that even in his drunken madness appealed to him.

'I do not know what you mean,' she said, with a little throaty quaver in her voice; 'I only know that you mean to insult me, that you are only saying this to cause me pain. If —if I have become so odious to you, Lionel, let me go back—let me go back to Nunwell.'

'Oh!' he said, his dark face distorted with passion, 'that's what you're aiming at! You want to go back? I've been expecting this all along. You want to go back, do you?'

'I will go back to-morrow if my presence here is distasteful to you, Lionel,' she said meekly. She hadn't the courage to defy him, to stand up for herself. 'I—I am ready to do anything you desire to make you happy——'

'Make me happy!' he said with a laugh.

'By Jove! this is the best thing I've heard. Make me happy!'

She heard him repeating it to himself and laughing all the way down the stairs; he had left the drawing-room door open as he flung out, and as she stood there listening, with her hands clasped before her, and every nerve in an agony, she heard the door of the room below close behind him.

She knew he had gone back for his evening's carouse, and that hours hence, after midnight, he would come upstairs again, and expect to find her there.

It was hard to know what to do. She was only a girl, a mere child, and she had formed such wonderful ideas of a wife's duties! The words she had said on that memorable day, when she stood in her white before that cold altar, with the rain pattering on the roof, were still ringing in her ears.

Love, honour, obey: she had promised to do all these things; there was no saving clause

added to excuse their non-fulfilment. There was nothing said about drunkenness, madness, cruelty, neglect. The words were without any qualification—when there is a new rubric these things will be altered. She had promised to love, honour, and obey her husband: she had taken him for better or worse. If he turned out 'worse,' *all* worse, and no better, she had nothing to complain of. It was no more than she had bargained for.

CHAPTER XII.

A STRANGE TASK.

EDITH DARCY had not been idle all this time. Her hands had been quite full. There was so much to get ready for her wedding, and there was no one to get it ready but herself. Most girls have friends, relatives, to assist, sometimes to undertake this happy work—it ought to be happy work, or it should not be attempted at all.

Edith had no one but herself to choose anything, to decide any vexed question, to make any wise suggestion; no one to flutter about her while she was trying on her wedding gown, and say tender, foolish things.

She had to go through it all alone in a cold, matter-of-fact way. She did not feel her loneliness so much as some girls would have done. She had been used to doing things for herself for years, since her mother died. It would be quite a new thing for her to have someone always by her side to consult, to fall back upon. She was years older—four, nearly five years older—than Derek Stanhope, but she looked up to him as if he were years her senior, perhaps because he was a man, or because she loved to have someone to look up to.

She consulted him about everything that she bought for the flat. She would not decide on a single thing without him. They spent hours together going through the furnishing departments of the Army and Navy Stores. He had no idea that so many things were wanted for a flat, and he could not tell how Edith had got the money. She bought everything they would need before her wedding, and paid for it.

When she came back from her wedding tour she would have a home ready for her—a nest ready furnished. It would be something to look forward to.

The money trouble had been all got over, and the trousseau was complete, as rich and complete a trousseau as any woman could desire; there was nothing wanting. The wedding was to take place in town. Mrs. Bellew was coming up on purpose that Edith might be married from her house; and her uncle, Richard Darcy, her father's brother, was to give her away. She would not be married from her uncle's house—there was an old feud that had not been bridged over, that separated her from her uncle's wife (his second wife) and children—but she had been willing that he should give her away.

He had offered her a home when her mother died, but she had refused it on his wife's account. He had married a young wife, a schoolfellow of Edith's, and there had been

some disagreement at the time, and the breach had never been healed. It would be so far healed now that she would be at the wedding, and two of the girls, her cousins, were to be bridesmaids.

She could not afford, she told herself, to marry a man and let his family think that she had no relations. There must, for appearance' sake, be somebody belonging to her at the wedding. She had to make her peace with his people, as it were, to justify herself for coming into the family; and her uncle, Richard Darcy, was the peace-offering. He was a man of wealth, and stood well with the world, and represented an old family, two old families—the Darcys and the Gunnings. The Gunnings were the older family of the two; the Darcys had only come over at the French Revolution. They were of recent date compared with the Gunnings, who had been people of distinction in the Church and country for centuries. Peter Gunning had been Bishop of Ely in the time of

the Stuarts; his portrait hangs on the staircase of the University Library at Cambridge, and smiles benevolently down upon the successive generations of undergraduates who climb those well-worn stairs.

Edith Darcy had to make the most of this connection; she had so few things to recommend her to her husband's family that she had to make the most of those she had.

The engagement had been a great disappointment to Derek Stanhope's people. He was a younger son, a third son, and his father, who held the family living—which had been decreasing in value every year—had nothing to give him. He had his commission, and a great deal of money had been spent on his education. He represented in himself the capital that had been sunk for his advancement, and it was clearly his duty to make the most of himself. It was a duty he owed to his parents for the sacrifices they had made for him.

He discharged this duty by falling in love

with a girl who hadn't a penny besides her 'allowance'—a slender allowance that was tied down to her for life, and that she was not suffered to anticipate. Edith had explained all this to her lover; he knew exactly how she stood; he had no excuse for his folly, except, indeed, the excuse—the old, threadbare excuse—that he was in love.

If he had married an heiress, or even a girl with a moderate amount of wealth, sufficient to enable him to keep up a certain position in society—to keep his head above water—his friends would have welcomed her with every demonstration of affection; but they had received Edith coldly. Nothing could have been colder than the reception she met with from the family of her *fiancé*.

They could not think what Derek could see in her—'a plain dowdy woman, old enough to be his mother!'

Her future sisters-in-law were very sweeping in their verdict; they did not mince matters.

They were quite sure that Edith was thirty-five, if she were a day ; that her beauty, if she had ever had any, was a thing of the past ; and that she was the last woman in the world that Derek ought to have married! If she had had the excuse of beauty, they could have understood his infatuation—men are so easily led away by a pretty face—but Derek had no such excuse.

They reckoned without their host ; they did not know, they could not tell, what Derek saw in the woman he loved. It is certain that he saw something in her that he had never seen in any other woman.

The attitude of her future husband's family had something to do with Edith's arrangements for the wedding. She would have been glad to be married quietly, without any show or expense, and to go away on her honeymoon without anybody being the wiser. Under the circumstances, this was out of the question. It would not do to have a hole-and-corner affair,

to slink into the family as if she had no right there. There was nothing to be done but to have a proper wedding, with the full complement of bridesmaids, and carriages, and wedding guests, and a champagne breakfast to follow.

It was all utterly distasteful to Edith, but it had to be done. Mrs. Bellew, who had known her for years, and loved her as a daughter, came up to town and offered to give the wedding breakfast and invite the guests. Edith was to be married from her house. She did not stop with the breakfast; she provided the carriages and everything else that had to be provided, as if Edith were her own child.

Grace Bellew, Dora's younger sister, had come up with her mother; she was to be one of Edith's bridesmaids. There were to be the regulation number—six bridesmaids. Edith's two cousins, two sisters of the bridegroom, a girl-friend, and little Grace, made up the number.

All this preparation was a worry and burden to Edith, who had wished to be married as

quietly as possible. A week before the time fixed for the wedding, she went to Lowndes Square to stay with Mrs. Bellew. Her things were all ready, and it was easier to have them sent direct there than to St. Oswald's. It was understood that Dora and her husband were coming up to town to the wedding. They had not yet returned from their honeymoon. The alterations that Captain Tremlett had suggested at Fryston would delay the completion of the work for another month. They could not live in the house that was being prepared for them if they came back. Dora had written to her mother to say that her husband was willing to come up to town till their house was ready for them, and that they hoped to be present at Edith's wedding. This had something to do with Mrs. Bellew's stay in town. She was longing to see her child again, and she would certainly not have seen her if she had remained at Nunwell.

There had been nothing heard of that wretched

necklace. Detectives had been about the house, making everybody's life a burden, ever since the loss was discovered, and Mrs. Bellew was not sorry to come up to town to get away from them.

They could have no excuse for following her here ; it was not likely that whoever had stolen the necklace had brought it up to town with him. She told Edith this on the first day that she came to Lowndes Square, while they sat talking after dinner.

Captain Stanhope had been dining with them, and when he came upstairs after dinner, Mrs. Bellew was telling Edith about the detectives ; and then he learnt for the first time the story of the missing necklace. Edith had never mentioned it to him. Why should she ? She had been so full of her own happiness—her own affairs had so occupied, so entirely absorbed her attention—that she had thought of nothing else. She hadn't a thought to spare for Dora Tremlett's loss.

'The detectives can't be very sharp,' he remarked, when he had heard the story from Mrs. Bellew, 'or they would have discovered some clue before now. Most likely the necklace has been taken abroad for sale, or the stones have been taken out and sold separately. They generally do this sort of thing, I believe, in diamond robberies.'

Edith dropped her fan while he was speaking —it was only a fire-screen fan, and she was shading her eyes with it from the fire—and he stooped to pick it up. When he returned it to her, he noticed that her face—she had been looking pale all day, pale and worried—had grown suddenly scarlet. He remarked it because the colour was so becoming to her. If any woman had an excuse for assisting Nature, it was Edith. She never looked so well as when she had a rich streak of scarlet on her cheeks. Her hand shook as she took the fan from her lover and held it before her hot cheeks. He did not think of it at

the moment, but he remembered it after—long after.

She went back to St. Oswald's the next day; she went back unexpectedly—some business, she explained, had called her back—and she did not return to Lowndes Square until the day before the wedding.

A letter had reached her the morning after that conversation about the missing diamonds, when her lover was present, and it related to the necklace. The letter had been forwarded to her from St. Oswald's, and a post had been lost in the transmission. It was from a gentleman who purposed to visit her at Gotham House to ask some questions relative to the loss of the diamond necklace. It was too late when she received the letter to alter the place appointed for the interview, and there was no alternative but to return to St. Oswald's.

She did not say anything to her hostess as to the nature of the business that called her back to her aunt's house; she only kissed her when

she went away, and promised to return the next day. There could be no reason for her keeping the object of her visit secret. Perhaps she did not wish to revive the unpleasant subject; Mrs. Bellew had already been worried to death about it.

On the platform at St. Oswald's station she saw the man who had offered to take her ticket a month ago at the London terminus. She recognised him the moment he got out of the train. He had travelled down by the same train, and stood waiting about the station until she had driven away. She could not tell why, but the sight of the man upset her—gave her an unpleasant, creepy sensation she could not account for.

Miss Gunning was not so well, she learnt, when she arrived at Gotham; the doctors had only just left her. One of her old delusions had revived, and she was in great trouble about being taken away. There had been some talk at one time, years ago, when her weakness of

mind first became apparent, of removing her, but it had been abandoned. Perhaps some hint of this had reached her at the time, and the old dread had suddenly revived.

She had been awake all night, listening for the carriage to drive up to take her away; and she had given orders that all the doors and windows should be secured—no one was to be admitted. She had insisted upon having the key of the front-door taken up into her room. The key had been taken up over-night, and it had not been brought down in the morning, and when Edith arrived she had to go round by the back way.

She went up to her aunt's room at once; the old woman would not be pacified unless she went up; she would not be persuaded that the men had not arrived, and were not in hiding somewhere, unless Edith went up and showed herself.

The bedroom-door was unlocked to admit her, and locked again after her—locked and

bolted. Miss Gunning was still in bed; she had refused to get up, and for further security she had pinned herself to the bed-clothes.

She had a pincushion before her when Edith went in, and she was busily engaged pinning herself to the sheets.

Blue-Eye and her female relative were sitting at the foot of the bed watching her; they had been watching her for hours, and were still interested spectators.

She could not spare a moment to return Edith's greeting; her hands were full of pins.

'I am very sorry, my dear, but there is not a minute to lose,' she said in her old quavering voice, as with bent, withered hands, that shook with eager haste, she stuck the pins in her clothes; 'the men will be here presently, and I must be ready for them. They can't take me away if I am fastened to the bed.'

The blinds of the room were closely drawn as usual, and in the dim light—it was a dull,

misty October day — Edith saw the strange figure engaged in this strange task, sitting up in the bed. It would have been a ridiculous spectacle if it had not been pathetic — the worn, wrinkled old face, with the scanty gray hair straggling out beneath the wide frills of a huge nightcap, and the long lean fingers eagerly plying their ridiculous task.

She had once been a beauty—a beauty and wit, the beautiful Miss Gunning—this silly old woman pinning herself to the bedclothes. Something in the attitude struck Edith as she stood there watching her: 'Would she ever come to this,' she asked herself, 'if she lived to grow old and selfish and narrow-minded, and had no one to love her?—would she grow like this some day, and pin herself to the bedclothes?'

It was a dreadful question—it was a ridiculous question to ask. She was not likely to grow selfish and narrow; her life was full of interests, fresh human interests, and she had

someone to love her, someone who was quite ready to swear before Heaven that he would love and cherish her all his life long!

She could not help smiling at her dismal thoughts; and then she turned away to ask Penfold how long this had been going on.

'She was took bad soon after you went away yesterday, Miss Edith, and she's been pinning herself up since six o'clock. If I've took out one pin I've took out a thousand; as fast as I take 'em out she sticks 'em in.'

'She is not ill, then? She can't be really ill if she has been sitting up since six o'clock. Perhaps it is only one of her whims.'

Penfold shook her head.

'The doctors don't say, miss; they are coming again by-and-by; they've only left instructions that we are to humour her and keep her quiet.'

While Edith was still talking to the woman at the foot of the bed, the front-door bell rang. It was a loud, noisy bell—its summons could be heard all over the house. The old woman

started up in bed, as far as the condition of the bedclothes would allow her to move at all.

'They've come!' she cried in her shrill, quavering treble; 'they've come for me at last—at last! I've been expecting them for years, and they've come at last!'

They could not pacify her; it was as much as Penfold could do to keep her quiet in the bed, until Edith promised she would go down and see the men who had come, and answer for her.

The last sound she heard as she went slowly down the stairs, when Penfold had locked the door after her, was the old woman crying out:

'They've come for me at last!'

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT WAS HE DRIVING AT?

EDITH went slowly down the stairs; she was not thinking of the interview that had brought her back, of the man who was awaiting her in the dining-room below; she was thinking of the scene she had just left, and wondering vaguely if by any possibility—if her life were suddenly wrecked and her happiness were to slip away from her—she could ever become like the old woman she had left pinning herself to the bedclothes.

The man who had rung at the front-door had been brought round the back way. The woman who had brought him round had ex-

plained to him, by way of apology, that it was one of Miss Gunning's whims to have the door locked. There was no secret made in St. Oswald's of the fact that Miss Gunning was subject to 'whims.'

If the truth were to be owned, the people of St. Oswald's were rather proud of the eccentricities of the owner of Gotham. Her residence in the High Street gave a certain amount of interest and importance to the shabby, decaying little town.

The man who was awaiting Edith in the dining-room below was the man she had seen at the station, the man who had once offered to take her ticket. She remembered the voice in a moment, and it seemed to grate upon her. There was no reason why it should grate upon her. He was a civil-spoken man who had only called upon her on a matter of business. She could not understand why his voice affected her; she found herself recalling all the incidents of the day when she had heard it

last. It was a day full of incidents, and they all crowded into her mind as the man was speaking to her. She did not pay much attention to what he was saying; she was thinking of something else. She found herself answering his questions vaguely, when she ought to have well considered every word before she spoke. He was only asking questions about the missing necklace—questions she had already answered. She was angry at being brought down here to go over the old ground.

But it was not all the old ground that this new man, with his unpleasant voice, was going over.

'Do you happen to remember what called you to town on the twenty-third of last month?' he asked, referring to his pocket-book for the date.

It was the day that she had seen him at the London station.

One of her sudden flushes came over Edith's

white face at the man's question, and she did not answer for a moment.

She was thinking of the quantity of business —business and pleasure—she had crowded into that short day.

'There were several things to call me to town,' she said presently.

'Would you mind telling me some of the things?'

She considered for a moment before she spoke; she could not see what her business in town could have to do with the loss of Dora's necklace.

'There is no reason why you should not know,' she said, 'though I don't see how it can possibly affect you. I went up to town to see my lawyer.'

'Would you mind giving me the address of your lawyer?'

Edith gave the information he desired rather impatiently. She was almost inclined not to give it at all.

'You had business with your lawyer?'

'Of course I had business, or I should not have gone up to town to see him,' she returned somewhat haughtily. How could it concern this man what business she had with her lawyer?

'When you left Lincoln's Inn Fields, where did you go?'

'Where? Oh! I did some shopping. I had a great deal of shopping to do.'

'You were shopping all day?'

'Most of the day.'

'About what hour was your shopping over?'

'About four o'clock.'

'You were shopping, then, from eleven o'clock until four?'

'Yes; I had a good deal to do.'

'Do you usually spend so many hours at a time shopping?'

The question was quite irrelevant; it was almost impertinent.

'I had reasons for spending so much time

shopping. I am about to be married, and I was buying my wedding things.'

The man didn't exactly whistle, but he drew a long breath.

'Indeed! pardon me, but do you propose to be married soon?'

'I am to be married next week.'

Edith's patience was at an end. She could hardly answer him civilly. If Derek Stanhope had been there, the man would not have dared to ask her such questions; he was taking advantage of her being alone and unprotected. In a few days more her lover would have the right to protect her, to defend her against all the world.

'You were buying things for your new home, then—furniture and such-like—besides your wedding clothes?'

'Yes, I looked at some furniture. I don't know whether I exactly bought it at that time.'

'You came up to town on a later occasion,

then, to decide about the furniture you had looked at ?'

'I came up to town several times before I quite settled upon the furniture. I am sure I don't know what this can have to do with the business you wished to see me upon,' Edith said impatiently.

The man bowed and smiled, but he did not attempt to go.

'Would you mind giving me the address where you bought the furniture ?' he continued. He was not a bit disturbed by Edith's anger.

'I bought most of the things at the Army and Navy Stores,' she said shortly.

'Will you give me the dates of the various occasions on which you went up to town to buy furniture ?'

'I did not always go up to buy furniture, and I am sure I cannot remember the dates,' Edith said indignantly.

'Perhaps I can assist your memory,' the man said, referring to his pocket-book. 'Did you

go to town on Monday the 28th of September, and Wednesday the 30th, and again on October 6th, besides subsequent occasions?'

The colour had dropped out of Edith's face while he asked these questions, and a startled look came into her eyes. She could not keep her voice quite steady when she spoke, and the words came reluctantly—

'I believe—I went up to town—on—those—dates.'

She could not have spoken another word if she had tried.

'And on each of these occasions you went for the purpose of shopping?'

Edith nodded her head.

'For no other purpose? You had no other business in town?'

'I had appointments to keep. I had to meet Captain — the gentleman I — I am going to marry——'

She spoke with difficulty; there was a lump in her throat that got in the way of the words

she was trying to speak—that seemed to choke them back.

'Had you any other appointments to keep besides those with the gentleman you are about to marry?' the man asked her, with his unpleasant smile and his unpleasant voice.

'I had no other appointments,' Edith said, turning away.

'Think again; try to recollect. Don't answer in a hurry. Had you not any other business engagements in town on the days that I have mentioned, besides those connected with the purchase of your furniture and wedding clothes, and your meetings with the gentleman you are about to marry?'

'I had no other business engagements.'

The man did not ask Edith any more questions. He gathered up his pocket-book and papers from the table, and he took up his hat off the floor, and wished Edith 'Good-morning' with his unpleasant voice, and went out, as he had come in, by the back way.

When the door had closed upon the detective, Edith went upstairs. She went up more slowly than she had come down. Something had come to her feet; they were so heavy that she could hardly lift them from the ground, and there was a strange confusion in her head. All the old portraits on the walls seemed to be looking down upon her with reproachful eyes, and the sound of her footfall on the stairs filled her with vague alarms.

She was growing like her aunt, she told herself impatiently. If she encouraged these foolish fancies, these groundless fears, she would soon be pinning herself to the bed.

A strange thing happened when Edith reached her own room. She sat down on a chair beside the dressing-table, and rested her head on her hand. She wanted to think, and the confusion in her head would not let her think. The room seemed to be going round with her, and there was a strange flutter at her heart and a gasping for breath, and then a

blank wall rose up before her. Edith had fainted.

She did not remember any more until half an hour later, when she found herself on the floor of her room, and Blue-Eye's relative rubbing its soft white fur against her cheek.

She did not know how long she had lain there; nobody would have come to her aid if she had lain there all day. There was only a white cat with a ridiculous name who took any interest in her. She could not help feeling grateful for even the affection of a cat; she wanted love, sympathy, so much, just at that moment. She wanted strong, tender arms around her, and a bosom to weep upon; and there was nothing but this white cat.

She took the soft white fluffy morsel in her arms, as she sat on the floor, and let her tears drop down upon it, into its long white fur. All the strength seemed to have gone out of her when she attempted to get up from that un-

dignified position; she could not think what had come to her.

The doctors—there were two doctors in attendance on Miss Gunning—came to see their patient again later in the day. She was quieter after their second visit, and she had allowed Penfold to take the pins out of the bedclothes; the delusion had passed, and she had fallen asleep. She was asleep when Edith went in to see her the last thing before she went to bed, and Penfold, who was worn out with watching, was nodding in her chair.

She stole softly out of the room without disturbing either; but she did not go to bed. She had a good deal to think about, and she had not been able to think till now. There had been a strange confusion in her head all day that had kept her from thinking. She had not been able to analyze her feelings; her head had been in a whirl ever since that interview with the man in the morning. Something he had said had upset her—upset her more

than she could tell. She did not understand the drift of his inquiries—she could not tell what he was driving at.

If only she could have known what he had in his mind, she would have been more satisfied; it was the uncertainty that upset her. She had not answered his questions quite truly—not with the accuracy and strict regard to truth that was expected of her—and the man knew it. *She was sure the man knew it.*

What use he would make of that knowledge it was impossible to say, or how it could concern him or concern the matter he had in hand. She had a perfect right to answer him as she had answered him; he had no business to pry into matters that only concerned herself. Still, if she had had to go through that interview again, she would have answered him differently. She would, as he had recommended her to do, have taken time to think.

She had written to her lover by the evening

post, but she had not told him anything about that wretched interview — the business that had called her back. She would not be able to come up to town, she told him, for a few days. Her aunt's illness would be a sufficient reason for remaining at Gotham until the wedding.

She went to bed, feeling miserable and depressed, with a load on her heart that she could not account for. For all the sleep she got, she might as well have stayed up. She got up after a time, and threw on her dressing-gown, and opened a bureau that stood against the wall of her room. She had already removed all her papers and letters from it—taken them away or burnt them. She might not have another chance of destroying them; it was not likely that she would ever return here again.

When her aunt died—and from what the doctors had let fall it was probable that the end was not very far off—the establishment,

such as it was, would be broken up, and the things would be all sold, and the money divided. There were ten living descendants of her uncle Richard Darcy—ten nephews and nieces to take their share of the spoil. Only an eleventh part would come to her ; it was not likely that any of the things she saw around her would descend to her : they would all pass into the hands of strangers.

Edith was thinking of this as she lay awake ; it was one of the things that kept her awake. As soon as she got rid of one troublesome thought another would take its place. It was this persistence of troublesome thoughts flitting across her weary brain that made her get up.

She was wondering what would become of the jewelry—the Gunning diamonds—that her aunt had spoken of, when the time she was anticipating came. No one knew of them, or suspected their existence. Even the trustees that Miss Gunning had appointed years ago were unaware of their existence, and it was

more than probable that they were not specially mentioned in her will. They had never really belonged to her aunt; they had belonged equally to both sisters. They were heirlooms, and therefore the property of the eldest son of the sister who had married, and of his descendants.

Clearly, they were her own property, Edith argued; she had only taken of her own when she removed that miniature-frame. She had never paid a second visit to the marqueterie bureau in the bow-room after she had shut it up that night. She had shrunk from touching things that, whether her own or not, she had no authority for removing.

She had taken away nothing but the miniature — the portrait of her own grandfather. It was still in the bureau before which she was sitting, and she took it up and looked at it as she sat there. It was in a plain, old-fashioned gold setting; nobody would have believed, to look at it, that it had ever had an outer frame.

Edith had not taken it away from Gotham with her other things; she had purposely left it behind her in the bureau.

It occurred to her, as she sat there with the miniature in her hand, that it would be better to return it, to put it back in the place from which she had taken it. If it were found here later on, it might provoke inquiry. It would be safer to return it. She did not even admit to herself that it was on account of anything that the man had said during the interview in the morning that she had decided to return it.

There could be no better time for returning it than now, when everybody was asleep and she was likely to be undisturbed. She opened her door softly, and stole noiselessly down the passage. It was a long passage, and the bow-room was at the farther end. It seemed to be full of threatening shadows as she went hurriedly down it, and the flitting, uncertain light of the candle she carried gave a kind of weird life and movement to the painted faces

that were looking down upon her from the wall. She felt like a thief stealing through the silent house in the night. She was not quite alone. Blue-Eye's aunt, who had a strange affection for her, had followed her softly down the passage, and rubbed against her as she opened the door, mewing in her ridiculous way to attract her attention.

She had to take the cat into the room with her; she could not leave it outside; it would have waited there, mewing all the time, and would have awoke the household. It was a horribly ghostly room to go into in the middle of the night, with all the cats in their cases glaring down upon her from the walls, and the stopped clocks, and her aunt's empty high-backed chair drawn up to the fireplace, and the great fire-guard before the hearth. It was all so uncanny and suggestive! Edith felt that she, too, should go mad if she lived long in this room.

She opened the marqueterie bureau with

difficulty ; there seemed something wrong with the lock. The papers were thrown together of a heap, as she had left them, but the recess where the diamonds were concealed was closed. She remembered pushing it hurriedly to when Penfold had come into the room and disturbed her, and now she could not open it again. She felt all over the inside woodwork of the recess, as Miss Gunning had done, but she could find no spring or sliding panel.

The diamonds which had been hidden away for fifty years were hidden away still ; it was not likely that the secret of their hiding-place would ever be discovered. The only thing that Edith could do was to put the miniature at the back of the recess, and pile the papers over it. It would be found there some day ; she did not really care what became of it ; it was out of her hands, and that was really all she was concerned about. It was with a feeling of relief that she locked the bureau. It was very troublesome to get the lock to catch, but it caught

at last, and she stole noiselessly back, as she had come.

Not quite noiselessly, for the white cat, who had followed her into the room, came out with her—she was careful not to shut it up in the room—and it rewarded her for her care by mewing all the way down the passage. As she passed her aunt's door, Penfold cautiously opened it and looked out.

'Oh, how you frightened me, miss!' she exclaimed, when she saw Edith outside. 'I thought it was a ghost!'

'There's nothing to be frightened about, Penfold. I was anxious and couldn't sleep, so I got up and came out to see how Aunt Maria was.'

END OF VOL. I.

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